RECEIVED
DEC 12 1991
BOISE STATE
UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

# the American Scholar

WINTER 1992 PRICE $5.75

Where We Are Now
JOHN LUKACS

*Amadeus* and Mozart
A. PETER BROWN

Who Needs Saddam Hussein?
BERNARD LEWIS

Conversations with Samuel Beckett
JAY A. LEVY

The Demons and Dr. Dawkins
DAVID STOVE

In Defense of Bullfighting
JOHN McCORMICK

Lawrence A. Cremin
DIANE RAVITCH

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# CHICAGO

## Trying Conclusions

*New and Selected Poems, 1961-1991*

**Howard Nemerov**

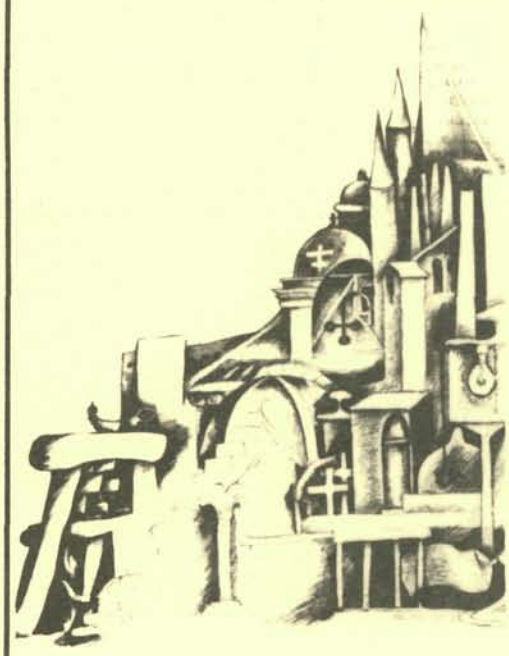
This collection of the most beloved and brilliant poems from Howard Nemerov's fruitful career includes twenty-three new poems. Written during his tenure as the nation's Poet Laureate, these new poems are imbued with vivid intelligence, an irreverent sense of humor, and masterful wit—trademarks of the Nemerov legacy.

"In wry poems wary of the world they celebrate, National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize winner Nemerov confronts life with insouciant defiance. A social critic, he writes witty, scathing, irreverantly funny or profoundly philosophical verses."
—*Publishers Weekly*

**Cloth $18.95 176 pages**

Howard Nemerov. Washington University Photographic Services

## NOW IN PAPER



## The Rise of the West

*A History of the Human Community*

**William McNeill**

*With a Retrospective Essay*

"This is not only the most learned and the most intelligent, it is also the most stimulating and fascinating book that has ever set out to recount and explain the whole history of mankind. . . . To read it is a great experience. It leaves echoes to reverberate, and seeds to germinate in the mind."—H. R. Trevor-Roper, *New York Times Book Review*

**Paper $19.95 864 pages 142 illustrations**

## John Locke's Liberalism

**Ruth W. Grant**

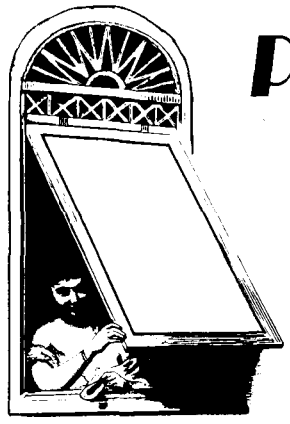
"An excellent contribution to Locke studies and to liberal political philosophy. . . . A remarkably clear and crisply written analytical account of Locke's normative political theory."
—James Tully, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*

**Paper $13.95 230 pages**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS**

5801 SOUTH ELLIS CHICAGO, IL 60637


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



# Pssst ... Attracted by Religion but Afraid Someone Will Find Out?

You can't shake off the allure of the Immense Questions — love, death, goodness, suffering, and the meaning of it all. You're bummed out on various secular panaceas — old nags such as Leninism, technology, egotism, and consumerism. You sense that *the* answers are the ancient answers — those in the tradition of Moses, Jeremiah, Jesus, Augustine, St. Francis, Aquinas, Dante, Thomas More, Tolstoy, Kierkegaard, Newman, Eliot, Buber, Niebuhr, C.S. Lewis, Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, Archbishop Tutu, and Mother Teresa. But you're a thinking person, and you've been told by your peers that self-respecting intellects don't need "fairy tales."

Well, maybe it's time to think more deeply, cast off your inhibitions, and probe the romance of religion.

Recently *The New York Times Magazine* discussed the NEW OXFORD REVIEW in the context of an article on the "return to religion" among intellectuals. Indeed, we at the REVIEW are in the vanguard of today's new intellectual enchantment with what Daniel Bell terms "the sacred." Among other things, we examine religious commitments that yield progressive and humane social consequences, and we scrutinize the religious dimensions of the great thinkers, issues, and events of the past and present.

An ecumenically-minded monthly magazine edited by lay Catholics, we've been characterized by George Will as "splendid," by the University of Chicago's Martin E. Marty as "lively," by *Newsweek* as "thoughtful and often cheeky," and by *Utne Reader* as "fascinating" and "surprisingly original." Those who write for us — Robert N. Bellah, Jean Bethke Elshtain, John Lukacs, Christopher Lasch, Norman Lear, Michael Lerner, Robert Coles, and others — are pathfinders who express themselves with passion, style, and lucidity. No need to feel embarrassed in our company!

Sure, there are other magazines and journals which focus on religion, but the NEW OXFORD REVIEW is unusual in that it is neither barrenly academic nor narrowly denominational, neither ideologically predictable nor safe and evasive. We get the juices pumping.

If you yearn to spring out of the iron cage of secularism — but don't want to land in the lap of the ayatollahs, cultists, or fundamentalists — subscribe today! (Or, if you're already out of the cage — or were never in it — keep the juices flowing and give us a try!)

(Please allow 2 to 8 weeks for delivery of first issue)

**SPECIAL DISCOUNT RATES FOR FIRST-TIME SUBSCRIBERS**

- ☐ One-year subscription. . . . . .$14 (regularly $19)
- ☐ One-year student, unemployed, or retired person's subscription . . . . . .$12 (regularly $16)
- ☐ Two-year subscription . . . . .$23 (regularly $35)
- ☐ One-year Canadian or foreign subscription . . . . US$17 (regularly $22) Payment must be drawn in US Dollars
- ☐ Sample copy. . . . . .$3.50

NAME (Please print or type)

STREET ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP CODE

Send coupon or letter. Make check payable to NEW OXFORD REVIEW. Mail to:

**NEW OXFORD REVIEW**
Room 596
1069 Kains Ave.
Berkeley, CA 94706

PAYMENT MUST ACCOMPANY ORDER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# the American Scholar

Published for
General Circulation
by
PHI BETA KAPPA

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

G. W. BOWERSOCK
PETER BROWN
S. CHANDRASEKHAR
WM. THEODORE DE BARY
GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB
HILTON KRAMER
CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

JACOB STEIN

MARY LEFKOWITZ
BRAD LEITHAUSER
BERNARD LEWIS
JUDITH MARTIN
ANGELICA RUDENSTINE
EDWARD SHILS
CAROL HOUCK SMITH

JOSEPH EPSTEIN, *Editor*
OTIS A. SINGLETARY, *Consulting Editor*
JEAN STIPICEVIC, *Managing Editor*
SANDRA COSTICH, *Associate Editor*
THOMAS NIEMAN, *Assistant Editor*
CARLEY STRAUGHAN, *Subscription Manager*
EDNA NWABUFO, *Subscription Assistant*

*Advertising Representative:* CLAIRE ISELI, 2108 Kingshouse Road, Silver Spring, Maryland 20905. Telephone: 301-384-2440. *U.S.A. Newsstand Distribution:* EASTERN NEWS DISTRIBUTORS, INC., 250 West 55th Street, New York, New York 10019.

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR (ISSN 0003-0937), published quarterly since 1932 by the Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009. For subscription information call 202-265-3808. Second-class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Copyright © 1991 by the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

POSTMASTER: Send all change of address notices, undeliverable copies, subscription orders, and other mail to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Subscription rates: for individuals, $21.00 one year, $38.00 two years, $57.00 three years, $5.75 a copy; for institutions, $25.00 one year, $46.00 two years, $69.00 three years, $7.00 a copy; foreign and Canadian $3.00 a year additional for postage.

Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by return postage. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury, or for the views expressed in articles published.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# CONTENTS


Toys in My Attic
*Aristides* 7

American History: The Terminological Problem
*John Lukacs* 17

The Middle East Crisis in Historical Perspective
*Bernard Lewis* 33

*Amadeus* and Mozart:
Setting the Record Straight
*A. Peter Brown* 49

The Demons and Dr. Dawkins
*David Stove* 67

Lawrence A. Cremin
*Diane Ravitch* 83

Luie's Gadgets: A Profile of Luis Alvarez
*George Greenstein* 90

Baron Haussmann and Modern Paris
*David P. Jordan* 99

In Defense of Poesie and Bullfighting:
Scenes from a Taurine Life
*John McCormick* 109

How Good Are Community Colleges?
*Allen Salzman* 116

**POETRY**

Weeping Cherries
*Margaret Holley* 47

Bedtime Stories
*Elisavietta Ritchie* 79

Thomas Wolfe
*John Dickson* 81

The Hairpin Curve at Durango
*Walter McDonald* 107

Art and Worship
*Bruce Bawer* 122

**BOOKS**

Conversations with Samuel Beckett
*Jay A. Levy* 124

Reviews
*Gary Saul Morson, Wallace Fowlie, Jim Holt,*
*Bruce M. Gans, John P. Sisk, Evelyn Toynton* 132

**THE READER REPLIES** 156



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# *New from Penn State Press*

## Creating Characters with Charles Dickens

Doris Alexander

In this study of thirty previously unrecognized models for Dickens's characters, most of them real people, Doris Alexander investigates Dickens's creation of his characters and the impact of the creative process on his life. She provides substantial insight into the creative process as it unfolded in Dickens's works.
240 pages, 24 illus. **$25.00**

## Exile and the Writer

Exoteric and Esoteric Experiences—A Jungian View

Bettina L. Knapp

Bettina Knapp examines the various forms of exile—forced and voluntary—and demonstrates that exile is a fundamental form of the human condition.
"*Exile and the Writer* is a first-rate piece of scholarship. It offers a profoundly urgent and sensitive analysis of a fundamental aspect of our planetary condition."
—Michael Bishop, Dalhousie University
288 pages **$29.50**

PENN STATE PRESS
Suite C, Barbara Bldg.
820 North University Drive
University Park, PA 16802

## Seven Types of Adventure Tale

An Etiology of a Major Genre

Martin Green

From Alexandre Dumas to Raymond Chandler, Martin Green examines adventure stories and their role in spreading the ideology of the modern nation-state. This is the second volume of the trilogy begun with *The Robinson Crusoe Story*.
232 pages **$22.50**

## Why Mona Lisa Smiles and Other Tales by Vasari

Paul Barolsky

*Why Mona Lisa Smiles* discusses Vasari's shrewd, witty, intimate awareness of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio and relates the *Lives* to the works of Castiglione, Aretino, Cellini, and Rabelais. Barolsky reveals the unexpected fantasy of Vasari, who imagined and then invented artists and works of art, as well as totally fabricating the lives of artists about whom he knew little or nothing.
144 pages **$22.50**

## Giotto's Father and the Family of Vasari's *Lives*

Paul Barolsky

In *Giotto's Father*, Barolsky shows that Vasari's *Lives* is a major source for the social history of Italian Renaissance art. This book completes the author's Vasari trilogy, begun with *Michelangelo's Nose* and *Why Mona Lisa Smiles*.
160 pages **$22.50**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# *Life and Letters* . . . . . .

## Toys in My Attic

ARISTIDES

On the campus where I teach, there is a landmark, a large rock on which fraternity and sorority members paint their Greek letters, the political-minded announce their slogans, and the whimsical occasionally indite their usually unobscene graffiti. The other day walking past it, I noticed that some less-than-advanced student of Latin had written: "Veni, vidi, vici." Instantly, my mind rejoined, "Veni, vidi, vici / Your mother looks like Nietzsche." Why does my mind do this? Where do such items come from? What sort of thing is this for a man in his fifties to be thinking? Ought I to seek, as they say, professional help?

Early on a spring morning in South Bend, Indiana, sitting alone in a quiet room overlooking a swimming pool, I notice two ducks alight on the water. "A pair of ducks," I think, "a pair of dukes, a pair of docs, a pair of dice, a paradise, a pair of Dekes, a pair of dorks, a paradox." I could go on, and that morning, for a bit longer, I did. In the newspaper I glanced at soon thereafter, someone was referred to as the "heir apparent" to some job I cannot now recall; but the phrase suggested to me another, which my pun-spewing mind put in the form of a riddle: "What do you call a toupee? You call it, obviously, 'hair apparent.' " A friend remarked that her eyes itch. "Eyesitch Bashevis Singer," I blurted out, since I happened to have been recently reading his novels. In the fullness of time, I was forgiven.

How long has this been going on? asks a fine old torch song sung, in my youth, by June Christy (the Misty Miss Christy, old guys may recall). How long has my mind been subject to such nuttiness? Only as long as I can remember, though the condition seems to be becoming worse as I grow older. Who put these toys in my attic? Can they ever be cleaned out, so that I can turn my thoughts to more serious matters? Is language therapy indicated?

Or is it not my mind but the silliness of words themselves that provokes me to such zaniness? Surely I am not the only one who has noted it. "I went over to Dover," Henry James wrote to a friend, then he added: "What a language we have, 'over to Dover'—it would have made Flaubert an even greater maniac than his own did." Is the English language inherently zany? Why is it so often the case, at least for me, that one word powerfully suggests another, often in some comic fashion. I hear the word *adhering* and I invariably think of the phrase *add herring,* and I don't even like herring. I hear the word *intuit* and I feel I ought to put more *in to it.* I see the name Immanuel Kant and my mind turns it into Immanuel Won't. When I hear the word *paradigm* all I can think of is the phrase from the Depression, "Brother, can you spare a dime?" I am like the little boy mentioned by F. L. Lucas in his swell book *Style* who remarked that "death" does not seem a very good word for what it describes, and when asked what word might be better, promptly replied, "Hig."

Have I been working with language too intensely for too long, like a man left out in the sun without a hat, who is consequently a bit touched? Are we talking here about a mild case of James Joyce fever? Truth to tell, I have been wandering about in (I won't say reading) Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and, strange to report, finding whole passages not only comprehensible but charming. This in itself is, as anyone who has taken up this book, a work seventeen years in its highly involuted making, a bit disturbing. What is disturbing is that I have come to think I know what it is that Joyce had in mind writing this just about unreadable book. But, here, do please try a passage on your own:



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What then agentlike brought about that tragoady thundersday this municipal sin business? Our cubehouse still rocks as earwitness to the thunder of his arafatas but we hear also through successive ages that shebby choruysh of unkalified muzzlenimissilehims that would blackguardise the whitestone ever hurtleturtled out of heaven. Stay us wherefore in our search for tighteousness, O Sustainer, what time we rise and when we take up to toothmick and before we lump down upown our leatherbed and in the night and at the fading of the stars!

What I believe the old boy, Mr. James Choice himself, had in mind was to demonstrate the comic instability of language, the way almost every word in English resembles some other word, if not in English then in another language, so that, if one is sensitive enough to language, its soundings and resoundings, one is lucky to be able to communicate at all. Setting aside the problem that language provides in meaning and precision, consider for a moment its hidden traps. The falling into unconscious puns, the double entendres, the boners, the howlers, the lavish prospects for lapses, the unconscious sexual metaphors, the horrendous comic possibilities awaiting anyone writing and speaking English—all these things make it apparent that the language is not altogether, as the folks down at computer city say, user-friendly.

In this list I haven't even mentioned irony, the disease that sets in among writers at a certain point of sophistication, and from which, once begun, return is impossible. "One is taught to refrain from irony," says Max Beerbohm in *Zuleika Dobson*, "because mankind does tend to take it literally." And in a radio broadcast, Max once remarked, "I wish, Ladies and Gentlemen, I could cure myself of the habit of speaking ironically. I should so like to express myself in a straightforward manner." You don't suppose he meant that last sentence, do you?

Please do suppose that I entirely do mean it when I speak of the comic instability of language. I do not have in mind here anything so fancy as tony deconstructionist notions about language being mystifying, illogical, hopelessly political, and therefore itself, somehow, discredited (to be replaced by what—seashells, perhaps?—has never been even murkily suggested). Nor do I have in mind the struggle to make words mean precisely what one wants them to mean, over which Flaubert daily wracked his brain (cracked his crane?). Poor Flaubert, whose letters to Louise Colet, his mistress, are filled with such groaning complaints about his endless wrestle with language: "Last week I spent *five days writing one page*, and I dropped everything else for it. . . . " "Do you know how many pages I have written this week? One, and I cannot even say a good one." The poor man had with words what must now be called a real "Flaubertian" problem. (There goes language, making a fool of one again.)

Flaubert's difficulty was in straining after an idea that might not have been achievable. "Oh!" he complained. "If only I wrote the way I know one has to write, I'd write so well." What he had in mind was a style in which every *mot* was absolutely *juste*. (Le Mot, I not long ago learned, is what many of his friends call the novelist Ward Just, and I like them and him straightaway for this little joke.) Here is what Flaubert had in mind:

> I envision a style: a style that would be beautiful, that someone will invent some day, ten years or ten centuries from now, one that would be rhythmic as verse, precise as the language of the sciences, undulant, deep-voiced as a cello, tipped with flame: a style that would pierce your idea like a dagger, and on which your thought would sail easily ahead over a smooth surface, like a skiff before a good tail wind.

What a lovely passage! "I believe he's got it," as Professor Henry Higgins might say. "By God he's got it!" But of course Flaubert, being Flaubert, would not have found this or anything else ever good enough. The writer's—or at least certain writers'—road to hell is paved with the desire for stylistic perfection.

Imagine the state Flaubert would have been in if he had had to oversee translations of his ever-so-meticulously constructed works. It would have taken him onto the stage above madness. Isaac Bashevis Singer, who achieved fame as a writer in English and not in the Yiddish in which he grew up and wrote to the end of his life, noted of translation that "the 'other' language in which the author's work must be rendered does not tolerate obscurity, puns, and linguistic tinsel." It is, of course, possible to enjoy the splendidly spare English translations of Singer's own stories and novels and still love the literary tinsel that he felt these



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## LIBERAL PURPOSES

Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State

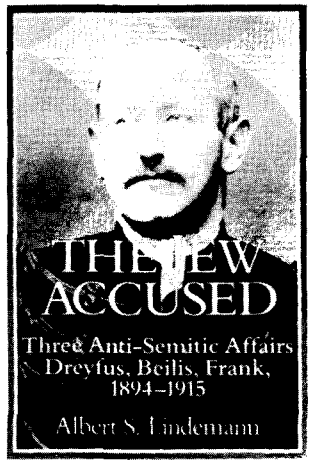
***William A. Galstone***

The author argues that the modern liberal state is committed to a distinctive conception of the human good, and to that end has developed characteristic institutions and practices — representative governments, diverse societies, market economies, and zones of private action — in the pursuit of specific public purposes that give unity to the liberal state.

*Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Public Policy*

41036-3 Hardcover $49.50

42250-7 Paper $16.95




## THE JEW ACCUSED

Three Anti-Semitic Affairs — Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank — 1894-1915

***Albert S. Lindemann***

"[Lindemann] is especially good at showing the mixed motives of both the accusers and the defenders. He also deftly portrays the historical background and ideological forces. This account is well written and detailed."

*— Library Journal*

40302-2 Hardcover $27.95

## AN INTERRUPTED PAST

German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933

***Hartmut Lehmann*** *and* ***James J. Sheehan,*** *Editors*

These essays describe the fate of those German-speaking historians who fled from Nazi Europe to the United States. The lives recorded here illustrate people's capacity to survive, adjust, and create under difficult circumstances.

*Publications of the German Historical Institute*

40326-X Hardcover $39.50

## GEOPOLITICS AND GEOCULTURE

Essays in the Changing World System

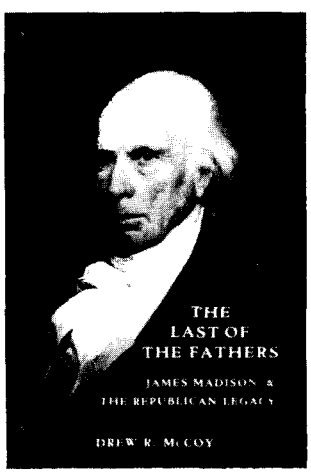
***Immanuel Wallerstein***

Written between 1982 and 1989, the essays in this volume offer Wallerstein's perspective on the events of the period, and the background to his interpretation of the momentous events of 1989.

*Studies in Modern Capitalism*

*Copublished with the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme*

40454-1 Hardcover $49.50/40604-8 Paper $12.95




***Now in paperback***

*Winner of the American Historical Association's John H. Dunning Prize*

## THE LAST OF THE FATHERS

James Madison and the Republican Legacy

***Drew R. McCoy***

". . . a brilliant analysis of Madison's conservatism, and of the way it operated in his reactions to the issues of his day. More important, he has shown how those issues emerged from the Constitution itself, as the conflicts it subdued grew too strong to be contained within the political framework it furnished. . . . It is a searching commentary on the ambiguities in the original constitution of the world's greatest republic."

—Edmund S. Morgan, *The New Republic*

36407-8 Hardcover $32.50/40772-9 Paper $14.95

# CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

**40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

translations must eschew. (The English writer Richard Church once noted that the sound of the word *eschew* was responsible for his deciding to become a writer, so fascinated was he by it when, as a child, he heard it for the first time. My own reaction to the word is rather different. When I hear someone say "eschew," I have to suppress saying "Gesundheit!")

Some often-translated writers have not let foreign languages stand in the way of their love of linguistic tinsel. Often these are writers who have command of not one or two but several languages. It may well be, it occurs to me, that one of the tests of command of a foreign language is to be able to recognize puns in it and, at a still higher level of command, to make puns in that language. Vladimir Nabokov is a case in point. (Is a man living in a rough neighborhood who carries a knife someone who has a point in case? Just thought I'd ask.) In the second volume of his biography of Nabokov, Brian Boyd tells of Nabokov's friend Alfred Appel reporting to him, during the wilder days of the sixties, that a nun in one of his classes at Northwestern University complained that a young couple near her in class was always spooning. Nabokov mockingly reprimanded his friend for missing a lovely opportunity. "You should have said, 'Sister, be grateful that they were not forking.' "

One good pun tends to provoke another, often less good pun. With Nabokov's pun in mind, is it not possible to say of Brillat-Savarin, the great chef and writer on gastronomy, that he was a forking genius? Yes, it's certainly possible, though probably not a good idea. Yet those who take pleasure in making puns are perpetually crouched to leap—couched to sleep?—always ready to fire away. Using puns in captions has long been considered an opportunity for a bit of fun, and journalists wait to get in their shot at it. Some seem rigged, such as the caption I once read beneath a photograph of trainers with stopwatches during an early morning workout at Aqueduct: "These are the souls who time men's tries." Which doesn't lay a glove on the journalist who had the chance to write a caption for a photograph of the late Aristotle Onassis looking at the home of Buster Keaton, which Onassis was thinking of buying. Under this photograph the lucky fellow was able to write: "Aristotle contemplating the home of Buster." Did yet another journalist caption a photograph of Mikhail Gorbachev, with a Kurdish child in his arms, "Kurd-carrying Communist," or did I make this up because I want it to be so?

You know you have the disease bad when you have puns ready-made and hope for situations to arise in which you can call them into play. There is a very good young writer on philosophical subjects named Josiah Lee Auspitz. If ever I were to know him well enough, I should like to compliment him on something he has written and go on to ask him if he wrote it at home or at the home of relatives on his father's side—that is to say, under different Auspitzes.

"T'ain't funny, McGee," as the wise Molly McGee used to say on their old radio show when reining in her husband at those times that his humor threatened to veer out of comic control. But then punning is famously a low art. One has to have a taste for whimsy to go in for it; and it is no surprise that those two most whimsical of English writers, Charles Lamb and Lewis Carroll, both went in for it in rather a large way: Lamb, always the good host, used to complain about his "nocturnal alias knock-eternal visitors." But then the distinctly unwhimsical Winston Churchill appreciated a good pun, and in his essay on Herbert Henry Asquith he recommends an elaborate pun off the words *wait* and *see* and *weight* and *sea* that he allows may be apocryphal but "deserves to survive."

Groucho Marx suffered this same weakness, which he turned to a strength as a comedian, and once wrote to his brother Gummo that he and T. S. Eliot had three things in common: "(1) an affection for good cigars; and (2) cats; and (3) a weakness for making puns—a weakness I have tried to overcome. T. S., on the other hand, is an unashamed—even proud punster. For example, there's his Gus, the Theater Cat, whose 'real name was Asparagus.' "

Groucho's sense of the comic instability of language was at the heart of much of his humor and hence of his charm. He was able to spin off the fragility of words like no other comedian of his time or of ours. I cannot recall specific examples of his doing this, so regular a feature of his performance was it. But if one were talking with him, one did well to watch one's vocabulary. Say "disgruntled" around him and he was likely to ask you if you ever



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

felt "gruntled." Mention that you were "nonplussed," he would likely ask when last you were "plussed"; he might even go a step further and ask if you ever read Marcel Plussed. He would wish things untrammeled, trammeled; things impeccable, pecced; things invincible, vinced. If you mentioned that you thought something feasible, he would doubtless ask how precisely does one feas it. Tell him he was frivolous, and he would beg leave to frivol on. When Groucho was on a roll, which was most of the time, it was probably safest not to speak around him at all.

Groucho could also be death on odd names. W. C. Fields, too, thought, as he might have put it, nomenclatural exotica riotously funny, and he became something of a connoisseur (a kind of sewer) of odd names and used them in his movies whenever possible, the odder the better. That someone happens to be named Velveeta Hickenlooper or Montague Fortinbras really lit up old Fields, a man who always had plenty of alcohol in his lamp in any case. (And couldn't Groucho have done fine things with a phrase such as a "lamp in any case"?) I do not share this appetite, though I sometimes indulge in it myself. I once owned a Volvo that had something called a Manual Choke; whenever I noted it written on the dashboard, I would say to myself, "Manual Choke, wasn't he one of those Cuban pitchers on the old Washington Senators?" To Shakespeare's question about what's in a name, I say, usually, a hell of a lot. What if Shakespeare's own name, for example, were Lou Peltz? Quite hopeless. Under the name Lou Peltz he couldn't have turned out a haiku.

But one doesn't really have to fall back upon names to find amusement in language. Neologisms supply enough comedy on their own. The cant phrase "work ethic" has always seemed to me to suggest its opposite, which would be "loaf ethic." One can readily imagine coaches using the phrase: "We like his loaf ethic, the way he seems to be able to kick back and do absolutely nothing for weeks at a time." To stay with sports, there is much talk these days in games about "momentum," but if there is momentum why not, as a matching item, "nomentum," when teams seem to lose their energy, slow down, fall apart? Teams with "nomo" would require plenty of players with a strong loaf ethic. Pleasing to know that I am not alone in finding so many of the neologisms of our day a bit goofy. Here is Richard Wilbur's take on the uncharming and not very useful "role model":

> When Jack came tumbling down the hill,
> The record shows that sister Jill
> "Came tumbling after." Was he her
> Roll Model, then, as I infer?

I have also taken much pleasure of late in the word *judgmental,* which is almost always used pejoratively, implying as it does that making judgments about anything is very bad form. I happen to have a friend who is a judge, and it delights me to be able to say to him, "Oh, Dick, don't be so judgmental," when the *man has no other choice. To revert to names* again, I am sure that there must, somewhere, be a man or woman on some bench, federal or local, named Judge Mendel. As Henry James says, "What a language we have."

Along with freshly minted neologisms, another prominent incursion upon the language of late has been the disappearance of the hyphen. I rather miss the darling fellow, so much that I have agreed to become Chairman of the National Committee to Rescue the Hyphen. Who stole it? you may wonder. Copy editors seem chiefly to blame. It evidently caused everybody too much trouble getting the little bugger right, so the decision was made to eliminate it in all but a minority of cases. The consequence is that one now comes across such strange-looking words as multiethnic, neoisolationist, rechoreograph, postpleistocene, antiodorous, prowoman, daylong, weeklong, monthlong, solong oolong howlong ya gonna be gone. Please make checks payable to The Com-mit-tee to Res-cue the Hy-phen.

Typographical errors have become another playground for the vagaries of language. Everyone knows how common they have become in recent years. Rare is the book that nowadays contains none. If you ever wish to depress a writer, tell him about all the typos you have found in his book. If you wish to make an enemy of him, tell him his book is "bristling" with typos; be sure not to forget that word *bristling.* Isaac Bashevis Singer has said, "An author doesn't die of typhus, but of typos." (The pun works better with a Yiddish accent.) Many have speculated upon why typos show up so much more frequently now than in earlier days. Some people have



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blamed it on computer typesetting; others on the belief that the kind of people who used to devote themselves to careful proofreading are simply not around. Evelyn Waugh, that wicked man, claimed that now that priests are no longer defrocked for sexual scandal it is impossible to get any decent proofreading at all.

For the present, typos, like love in the George Gershwin song, are here to stay. May as well get what enjoyment one can from them. I was not long ago told by an editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* that in a review I wrote of a book about White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture in America, my phrase "the way of the WASP" came out on galleys as "the way of the Wisp," which is rather charming. The same week the word "Freudian" came out "Fraudian," which is rather telling. Twice the last line in Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Bend Sinister*, "A perfect night for mothing," was changed by proofreaders to "A perfect night for nothing." The situation is not so different with "discrete," with a single *e* between the *r* and the *t*; use it and some proofreader is almost certain to change it to "discreet." Be discreet; forget about discrete.

Then there are those words that one cannot be sure are typographical errors. "Only connect" famously begins the epigraph to E. M. Forster's *Howard's End*. Edward Shils, who knew Forster at King's College, Cambridge, once told me a story about convincing Forster to send some pages of a diary he had been keeping to the magazine *Encounter*, which was about to publish an anniversary issue, but in the end Forster sent the pages to *Harper's*, where he was able to get the larger fee. "Do you suppose," Shils said, recounting the story, "that what he really meant was 'only collect'?"

And let us not forget those typos of the mind and tongue—"mindos" and "lipos" they ought perhaps to be called. Richard Sheridan had the genius to give them, through a character he invented for *The Rivals*, the name of malapropisms. "As headstrong as an *allegory* on the banks of the Nile," says the blithely confident Mrs. Malaprop. The English journalist Jilly Cooper reports that her charwoman, learning that a house the Coopers had bought was reputed to be haunted, said: "You'll have to get the vicar to circumcise it." Samuel Goldwyn made of such slips almost a specialty. "In two words," he once reportedly said, "im possible." On another occasion, he told an employee, "If I want your opinion, I'll give it to you." I'm sure he did, too.

Foreign-born English speakers often—and understandably—fall into these lapses. "The lawyer has put all the money in egg roll," a friend swears she heard an elderly Jewish woman say. "Gingée Rogée," a Frenchman who taught at the University of Chicago used to pronounce the Hollywood actress's name. Did I actually hear a woman describe another woman as "no longer a sprung chicken," or did I make it up? Probably not, for the foreign-born are especially good at muddling clichés. "You don't want to take the baby out of the bathwater." Or: "When they made her, they really broke the gold." I like to invent these on my own. "I am eating these strawberries," I recently announced, "like I'm going out of style." I have also been heard to mutter: "In for a penny, in for a pounding," and "You live and you yearn."

"Mother," a little boy is supposed to have announced upon returning home from school, "do I have a cliché on my face?" "A cliché?" his mother asks. "You know," the boy replies, "a worn-out expression." Except in the realm of ideas, I have come rather to prize clichés, provided they be old enough. Of Lytton Strachey, Max Beerbohm wrote, "He is not afraid of clichés," and he meant it as a compliment—a sign, I suppose, of self-confidence in a truly accomplished writer. Even H. W. Fowler allowed that there were clichés and clichés, and some were not only better than others but indispensable:

> To take one or two examples from the many hundreds of words and phrases that it is now fashionable to brand as clichés, writers would be needlessly handicapped if they were never allowed to say that something was a *foregone conclusion*, or *Hobson's choice* or a *white elephant*, or that someone was *feathering his nest* or *had his tongue in his cheek* or *a bee in his bonnet*. What is new is not necessarily better than what is old; the original felicity that has made a phrase a cliché may not be beyond recapture.

I seem to have spent much of my life avoiding clichés, only now to confess a secret, small but steady pleasure in certain of them. Hoist, you might say, on my own foulard.

I also enjoy using slightly I won't say archaic but nicely out-of-it words. *Crosspatch*,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Freud's Moses

*Judaism Terminable and Interminable*

**Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi**

This remarkable book provides fascinating new insights into Freud's intentions in writing *Moses and Monotheism*—his only work specifically devoted to a Jewish theme.

"**Impassioned and lucid;...original and...brilliant.**"—Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

"The privilege of watching a penetrating contemporary mind engaging one of the great thinkers of the modern age results in **an intellectual adventure of the first order, one not to be missed.**"—Phillip Lopate, *Newsday* Illus. $25.00

*Now available in paperback*

## Three Behaim Boys

*Growing Up in Early Modern Germany*

A Chronicle of Their Lives, edited and narrated by **Steven Ozment**

"A fascinating compilation of letters from three members of the same German family, written between 1523 and 1638....A splendidly researched, stylishly and clearly annotated, crisply translated, ultimately satisfying work of scholarship."—*Kirkus* $16.00

## Gandhi

*Prisoner of Hope*

**Judith Brown**

The definitive biography of one of this century's most important—and controversial—figures.

"Drawing on a wealth of new sources only recently made available to historians, **Brown paints a compelling portrait of an elusive personality.**"—Jim Miller, *Newsweek* 24 illus. $17.00

## Reading Freud

*Explorations and Entertainments*

**Peter Gay**

Provocative, amusing, and intriguing insights into the great psychoanalyst's life and thought.

"Gay...offers **cohesive, startling insights** into Freud's mind....**A valuable contribution to our understanding of a remarkable thinker.**"—Judith D. Schwartz, *The New York Times Book Review* $15.00

**Yale University Press**

Dept. 743, 92A Yale Station, New Haven, CT 06520

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*fussbudget, pernickety, zealot*—it's words such as these that I enjoy unfurling when the occasion permits. I have a preternatural regard for the word *trousers* and go with it every time over *pants* and the all-too-slick *slacks*. I say *alas* so often and with such earnestness that I don't believe it qualifies as affectation. I like, too, old clichés whose meanings I don't quite understand and don't always try to discover. I am grateful for the occasion that allows me to say that someone or other left "hell-bent for leather" or that something or other was done to "a fare-thee-well." I wish there were more opportunities for me to use the phrase "shiver my timbers," but then I guess you can't have everything.

Having always had a strong taste for metaphors, I have done a fairly brisk business in them in my own writing, and I admire them greatly when they are cleanly struck off in the work of other writers. But they do provide delicious food for unconscious comedy. Mixed metaphors are rarely in short supply. Literary critics can be depended upon to talk about "fictional voices that have grown teeth and are ready to bite into the heart of the artistic enterprise." (Get that metaphor to an orthodontist.) Near misses are always interesting to contemplate, too, such as John Updike's "I awake in light, feeling as if my soul had a slight sore throat." (Get that metaphor to an eye, ear, nose, and throat theologian.)

The miscast metaphors that give me most pleasure are the unconscious and perfectly, delightfully inappropriate ones. "A good metaphor," said Aristotle, "implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars." A comically bad metaphor has a mildly grotesque inappropriateness, often implying the failure of the perception of dissimilars in similarity. "A broken toe," such a metaphor might run, "is a real pain in the neck." Sex, being a subject strewn with slang, is one in which these unconscious metaphors show up to a most hilarious effect. Using metaphor in the realm of sex is, to speak metaphorically, like walking in a poison-ivy-covered cow field filled with land mines—danger lurks wherever one steps. I shall always prize the student who wrote that "Madame Bovary's problem was that she couldn't make love in the concrete." So, too, the man who announced that "it is time for some straight talk about the gay liberation movement." And, again, the journalist who wrote that "urbanology is a virgin field pregnant with possibilities."

For many years now editors have played off the comic richness of language in the titles they have given articles and reviews in their magazines. Sometimes these are plays on words ("When Putsch Comes to Shove"), sometimes reversals of words ("Britannia Waves the Rules"), sometimes sheer whimsy ("Yes, We Have No Cézannas"). Nearly thirty years ago, I tried my hand at this sort of thing when I was a sub-editor on a small political magazine, but I was sent from the principal editor's office in disgrace when I tried to title a review of a crybaby autobiography "The Days of Whine and Neurosis." A pity, really, for after all this time I still like it.

I am very glad that English is the language I grew up in, if only because I don't think I would have had a chance to learn it as an outsider. I am altogether too literal-minded to have been able to accept with serenity its vast number of inconsistencies. Why, any foreigner must wonder, does one drive on a parkway and park in a driveway? A slim chance and a fat chance—how can these be the same? What is a homeless community? What has egg to do with eggplant? Drink up, call up, dummy up, slow down, drink it down, play it down, be bored stiff, blue, out of one's gourd, big deal, no deal, do a deal—yumpin' yimminy, *bon Dieu, oy gevalt*, forget about it!

And what would a foreigner make of the new all-purpose American adjective *fun*? The word sometimes even had its problems as a noun. The late Vernon Young, an Englishman, film critic, and immitigable highbrow, once asked me what I supposed it was Americans had in mind when, upon parting from him, they sometimes instructed him to "have fun." But what would he have made of such more recent locutions as a "fun person," a "fun time," the "fun part"? I once left a restaurant, which attempted to duplicate the food and what its owners misconstrued to be the feel of the 1950s, in the company of a woman who is often rather stringent in her opinions about food and language. "We must never go here again," she said. "I fear this is a restaurant for fun couples." Sorry but there are not enough italics and quotation marks to signify the completeness of the contempt with which she used that last phrase.

But as an American I am not always clear on what words mean, so fast is the language



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moving, so wild are some of its inventions. What does it mean, for example, to call something "freezer-fresh"? ("Don't get fresh," mothers used to say to children of my generation who looked as if they might attempt to sass them. And whatever happened to the word *sass*? We still have the activity but no longer the word.) Cars are no longer "used" but "preowned"—with an extra charge, doubtless, if they throw in the hyphen. Slums and now even ghettos are gone, leaving people who used to live in them gamboling in the "inner city." "Terminal living" apparently means you are just about dead.

Sometimes I ask myself how this mania for language, which has been my making and threatens sometimes to become my undoing, came about, both in myself and in others who share in it. Why am I such a sucker for sentences that have a kick in their tail, such as this by Kingsley Amis, who in his *Memoirs* writes that "one does rather go through life constantly suffering from unpreparedness for how awful things are going to be, starting with human nature." I have a weakness for happy linguistic inventions. Chips Channon's "antipatico" seems to me quite as helpful as the "simpatico" from which it derives. Donald Tovey's referring to detective and spy stories as "illiterature" is a helpful addition to the language, as is "neodoxy," which means obedience to the new. I like Kitty Muggeridge's description of the television johnny David Frost as someone who has "risen without trace." I am also respectful about precision in connection with the unknowable. When Maurice Richardson describes a Hungarian drink as tasting "like hornet's piss," it strikes me that he has chosen well, for, though I haven't kitchen-tested any of this, the urine of a hornet sounds, somehow, much bitterer than that of a wasp or a bee.

"The limits of my language," said Wittgenstein, "are the limits of my world." That seems a true, an almost commonplace statement, but neurophysiologists, in their recent researches, are beginning to make it seem rather shaky, claiming that language can only be explained at the neural level. It is now thought that different parts of language—proper and common nouns, regular and irregular verbs, and so forth—are processed in different areas of the brain. The latest view is, according to an article in the *New York Times,* that "language and perhaps all cognition are governed by some as-yet-undiscovered mechanism that binds different brain areas together in time, not place." This is all much more complicated than I can hope to grasp, but it does begin to explain to me the linguistic oddities bequeathed to many victims of strokes. I had a dentist who, suffering a stroke on a photographic safari in Africa, lost his memory for all proper nouns and his powers of consecution, or of following anything consecutively. After his stroke, H. L. Mencken lost his ability to read and write and could only speak haltingly, the right words refusing to come to him. Different bitter jokes for different ghastly strokes.

But does the brain perhaps play tricks on others of us who have had no stroke by giving us a larger drawer than most for frivolity in the ample cabinet of language? Why is it that some of us are more alert to the capriciousness of language than others? Possibly the problem could have to do with nothing so elegantly scientific as studies of the brain but instead with an ingrained whimsicality of nature. Such, I have little doubt, is my own nature. I have long believed, for example, that I would be very good—too good—at writing advertising copy, and I am glad that I was never given a chance to try, lest it turn out to be so. I also have secretly believed that I might have been a decent lyricist, for whom the meaning and weight of words mean less than their playfulness and rhyme.

Not long ago a friend who holds an option on the F. Scott Fitzgerald story "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" asked me if I would like to try my hand at turning it into a musical by writing what I believe is called "the book" and lyrics for it. This is not one of Fitzgerald's great stories, I think, but it is one of his great titles. As a musical, this title could go a long way. Somehow I saw, in my mind's greedy little eye, people talking about having seen *Diamond*—yes, *Diamond,* that is of course how they would refer to it—in London, where the cast was much better than in New York. Everyone would see *Diamond,* and I would see gold, much gold, pile up around me. My friend asked me to think about it.

I tried not to but couldn't help doing so. Suddenly free moments—in the shower, walking the street, before falling off to sleep at night—seemed all to be given over to my writing song lyrics in my head. Good to be able to report that the world will be spared



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

having to hear such half-composed, not quite half-witty classics as "He's Got That Midas Touch," "Champagne Is the Only Pain That Glorious Life Need Ever Contain," and the really quite unforgettable "Still Priapic Over You," with its delightful opening line: "No matter what the topic, I'm always quite priapic, darling, priapic over you." *Diamond*—I fear that, for the present, you'll have to miss it, at least in my version.

Not only does the world not need my song lyrics, but neither do I, for I already have a plenitude of other people's bopping around in my brain: you go to my head, and I think I'm going out of my head, when we are dancing and you are dangerously near me, cheek to cheek, with sand in my shoes in Havana, in a small hotel, on a horse with no name, as time goes by, nice work if you can get it, s'wonderful, alone again, naturally, or is it (in the words of the all-too-mortal Temptations) just my imagination, so let's call the whole thing off.

As lines from songs both lovely and junky regularly pop into my head quite without being called up—and let us not speak of commercials: "The heartbeat of America, that's today's Chevrolet"—so, quite as insistently, do punch lines from jokes: "This could lead to dancing," I want to say to a student who says something quite foolish in class. "What! And leave show business?" I think, when someone suggests that I give up some boring task or other. "Mark it down, Morris," I say to myself, when I know I am apt to forget some small item, "mark it down." "And about my humility," I mutter within when someone offers me a few kind words of praise, "about my humility, not a word?"

In danger of being flooded by language, I need every so often to find a life preserver, and I look for it in stately language, in which solid words stay moored to sound thought. Whenever I am addressed by the title of Doctor, I always want to—and sometimes do—say, "Please read two chapters of Henry James and get right into bed." But, in fact, when I am myself suffering from the linguistic equivalent of seasickness, I tend to take my own advice and read a writer whose language does not bob around: Samuel Johnson, or George Eliot, or Santayana, or Winston Churchill. A few pages from any of these or from a few other writers and I am ready to return to the battle.

The English poet and essayist Alice Meynell, in a brief essay on dialects, writes of the dialects of Venetians or Genoese of another day: "We may believe that it is a simple thing to die in so simple and so narrow a language, one so comfortable, neighborly, tolerant, and compassionate; so confidential; so incapable, ignorant, unappalling; inapt to wing any wearied thought upon difficult flight or to spur it upon hard travelling." Dying in a simple language, which had never occurred to me before I came across it in Mrs. Meynell, is a charming and devoutly to be desired condition.

But what if, as seems more likely, my physicians and nurses speak the standard psychobabblified, jargon-ridden, watery lingo of the day? What if my physician tells me that I am a "special person," my nurse mentions that she has a few thoughts she wishes "to share" with me, and the various technicians monitoring my passage into the next world speak to one another of being "conflicted in their career choice"? Perhaps now is the time to go back to that living will I not long ago signed. Where in it I give instructions to pull the plug—and what a happy phrase that is!—I ought to add that another set of plugs be immediately placed in my ears, preferably ones connected to a machine playing Schubert sonatinas and blocking out the blight of sappy language that most distinctly is not the last sound I wish to hear. When mustering-out time arrives, I do hope no special persons are around—and no bloody caring ones, either—and all will keep their conflictions to themselves, so that I shall be left alone with the few people I love and the music of Schubert, in repose, lying there, like a bunny easterized upon a table, as the poet didn't quite say.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# American History

## The Terminological Problem

JOHN LUKACS

DURING THE 19TH CENTURY the main events in the histories of Europe and the United States were different. In the history of the United States they were the westward movement, the Civil War, and mass immigration. In the history of Europe they were the revolutions of 1820, 1830, 1848, and then the—much more important—unifications of Italy and especially of Germany. These events were, of course, related to some extent, involving both continents, but not greatly so. When we come to the 20th century the opposite is true. In the histories of both the United States and Europe, the main events for both were the two world wars. The rise of the United States as the greatest Atlantic power, the Russian revolution, the Third Reich, the atom bomb, the end of the colonial empires, the establishment of Communist states, the division of Europe and of Germany, the emergence of the two world superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union, the cold war between them: all of these were the consequences of the two world wars, of those two enormous mountain ranges that towered over the historical landscape of the century, in the shadows of which we were living, until now.

The 20th century was a short century. It lasted seventy-five years, from 1914 to 1989, its entire history dominated by the two world wars and their consequences. These consequences include, too, transformations of American society and transformations of American politics.

All of this should be obvious: but for many Americans it was not so obvious for a long time. For at least one American generation (and to many American historians) the most important event was the Depression and what followed it. That led not only to a change in the functions of American government. It involved, in one way or another, the lives of more Americans than had the wars. Yet the Depression and its consequences were less important than the consequences of the two world

✪ JOHN LUKACS teaches history at Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia. His most recent book is *The Duel*, an account of the struggle between Churchill and Hitler.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wars. Whereas in Europe (and in England) World War I had already put an end to the limitations of massive government intervention into the economy, in the United States these limitations lasted until 1933, when government intervention was desired by the great majority of the American people. The Depression, and the reforms of the New Deal, brought no radical changes in American ideas and beliefs. (As a matter of fact, it often brought American families closer together, as both certain statistics and the reminiscences of certain thoughtful Americans reveal.) In sum, the transformations of American government and society consequent to the two world wars (and especially to World War II) were more decisive, in the long run more drastic, and—perhaps—less ineluctable than were the changes following the economic crisis of 1929–33.

The movement of American thoughts and beliefs toward a global involvement began to take form in the 1890s. This represented a profound, though gradual, change in the character of those beliefs. During the first one hundred years of American independence, most Americans believed that the destiny of the United States was to build a new world that was, and ought to be, different from the old world of Europe. During the next one hundred years, Americans came to believe that the United States was, and should be, the advanced model for the rest of the world. In many ways this happened: the Americanization of the world, ranging all the way from the adoption of American governmental practices to the adoption of American popular culture, made the 20th century an American century. Add to this the remarkable fact (seldom seen thus by either American or European historians) that the American entry into the European war in 1917 was a more important—meaning: more consequential—event than the Russian revolution in that year. So it was, both in the short and in the long run. In the short run, in 1917–18, Russia's withdrawal from the war did not decide its outcome, whereas America's entry did. In the long run Lenin's ideas about proletarian class-consciousness and the prospects of international revolution had a lesser effect on the world than had some of the ideas perpetrated by Wilson, that pale professor-president—including his propagation of national self-determination, instrumental in the destruction of entire countries more than seventy years ago, and continuing to be instrumental in our day. *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice.*

At any rate, when Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America,* the United States was the only democratic country in the world; whereas in the 20th century the democratization of many other societies should call for another work, a sort of Tocqueville in reverse: *American* democracy. Yes, there are elements in the democracy of the United States that make it different from, say, that of England or Germany or Spain or Japan, all democracies now. But: were the main political realities in American



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

history still unique during the 20th century, essentially different from those of Europe? Many Americans, including American historians, still think so. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that they were not.

## II

During the 19th century they *were* different. Yes, even during that century many of the nations of Europe were moving in the direction of democracy, albeit more slowly than the United States. Yes, the so-called Industrial Revolution (in reality, an evolution and not a revolution) affected countries in both continents. But during the 19th century the history of the United States was already the history of a people; whereas European history in the 19th century was still predominantly the history of states. (I am leaving aside the crucial term *nation* to which I shall turn in a moment.)

The history of politics is the history of words. Tocqueville knew this when, 160 years ago, drawing the conclusion in part from his American experiences, he wrote that "a new science of politics is necessary for a new world." For 160 years this has not been really forthcoming, with the principal consequence that our political vocabulary has become antiquated and corroded, at times beyond usefulness, to the extent where not only confusion but corruption sets in.

It is at least remarkable that our present political terminology, in English, became current shortly before Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America*. Of the three commonly used terms, the adjective *radical* is the only old English one. The political noun *liberal* (a positive and approbatory English adjective at that time, but only in a non-political sense) appeared in England in the 1820s; it was a political word borrowed from Spain. (For a few years the English used it in its Spanish form—that is, "*our Liberales.*") It was in the 1820s, too, that *conservative*, as a political term, was beginning to be employed in England; and it took another decade and a half before the Tory party began to call itself the Conservative one.

More remarkable is the fact that these terms—as well as those of *Right* and *Left*—rarely appeared in American political usage until well after the Civil War. The reason for this is simple. There was a fundamental difference between the United States and Europe, including England. All over Europe and England the debate and the struggle in most of the 19th century involved conservatives versus liberals. In the United States it did not. There was no conservative party in America. The very word *conservative* had a pejorative tinge in American usage when applied to politics (and even to other matters, on occasion). It may be argued that the Federalists were an American conservative party until



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their demise after 1816, or that the South was "conservative" when compared to the North (some of the southern political theorists and spokesmen began to employ the term in a positive sense, here and there, during the 1850s). In reality, they were not. Both the Federalists in the period 1810–20 and the Southerners in the 1850s were a peculiarly American mix of conservatives and radicals: both of them professed to believe in the sovereignty of the people—while in Europe no conservatives, and not even all liberals, had, as yet, accepted that. It was not until after the middle of the 20th century—in 1954–55—that *conservative*, in the United States, began to acquire a positive meaning, and that a "conservative" political movement in the United States began to rise—one of the results of the decline of liberalism in America.

But in Europe the decline of liberalism had begun already around 1870. This has been remarked, and occasionally described by some European (and especially British) historians. They saw the change from "classical"—that is, individualist liberalism—through the acceptance of universal suffrage, toward mass democracy, indeed toward the welfare state. What they often did not see was that after 1870 the entire antithesis of conservatism and liberalism (and, in some ways, that of Right and Left) was losing its meaning. Until about 1870 in England, and in much of Europe, the main debate and struggle was the one between conservatives and liberals. After 1870 this was less and less the case.

There were two factors in this transformation. One (and perhaps the less important) factor was that the advocacies of conservatives and liberals had begun to overlap. The British and European conservatives were becoming liberals, since they were now prone to accept (and were even willing to profit from) the functioning of mass democracy, including extensions of universal suffrage, the gradual disestablishment of state churches, the abolition of censorships of various kinds, and the predominance of industry over agriculture. The remaining old-fashioned liberals, on the other hand, had become conservatives, at least in the broad sense of that word. The liberal parties were still, by and large, the parties of reform, but less and less so; and their opposition to authority evoked fewer and fewer echoes in the minds of the masses. (There were exceptions to this, of course, old-fashioned liberals such as Gladstone or a newer type such as Lloyd George who was, in reality, a nationalist radical of sorts.) Something else had begun to appear, with plentiful echoes among the masses. This was the novel phenomenon of popular nationalism (misunderstood and ignored by Marx, who could not distinguish the *nation* from the *state).*

That was the second, and probably more important, factor of the piecemeal fading of the great conservative-liberal division. Unlike the Hegelian (or Marxian) scheme, the main result of the fading of the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

antithesis was not that of a new and transcendent synthesis. In reality, conservatism versus liberalism was being replaced by a new and near-universal antithesis—antithesis at first, conjunction afterward—of nationalism and socialism. For about one hundred years, from 1770 to 1870, the main political realities were those of conservatism and liberalism, their struggles and their relationships. For the next hundred years after 1870 these were replaced by nationalism and socialism.

About socialism there is not much to say, since its development has been (or, rather, should be) obvious. Democracy, as Tocqueville saw, involves the propagation and the extension of equality even more than that of liberty. The welfare state was in the making a generation before, say, Franklin Roosevelt or Léon Blum, by such diverse men as Bismarck or Theodore Roosevelt. Nothing is inevitable in history; but by the beginning of the 20th century the inclinations of governments—whether freely elected or not—to provide for the welfare of the majority of their peoples was about as inevitable as anything. In 1894 Sir William Harcourt, an old and respected liberal leader in the House of Commons, uttered his celebrated and melancholy exclamation: "We are all Socialists now!" Only it was national, not international, socialism that was in the making. The first of these adjectives turned out to be more important than the second. "Socialism" was becoming a general phenomenon; but the word was avoided in certain countries and qualified in others. In England, the conscious and cautious policy of the early Labour movement to eschew, at least for a while, the very word *socialist* attests to this. Another example was the emergence of "Christian" socialists in central Europe. Despite their assertion of respect for the positive social teachings of the Catholic church (anti-Marxist as well as anti-capitalist), the new political adjective *Christian* was a nationalist term, negative and exclusive, meaning non-Jewish, non-liberal, non-Marxist, non-cosmopolitan, non-international. Where the socialists had a bad reputation this was not because they were dangerous radicals; they were dangerous because they were anti-national.

Our problem with "nationalism," perhaps especially in English, is more complicated. The reason for this is its relatively late appearance in English (also in some other European languages)—an indication, in itself, that nationalism is a very modern, and not at all a reactionary, phenomenon. *Nationalism,* in English, appeared first in 1844 *(OED),* by and large within the same quarter century when *conservative, liberal,* and *socialism* (as well as *capitalism*: 1854 [*OED*]) acquired their political meaning. Among all of these terms, the reality of nationalism is the least outdated, since it has proved to be the most enduring and powerful of all of them.

That *nationalism* differs—and often profoundly—from *patriotism* is



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something to which we should have paid more attention, especially in the United States where the two terms are still regrettably confused: when Americans speak of a super-patriot they really mean an extreme nationalist. When Dr. Johnson pronounced his celebrated phrase, "Patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels," he meant nationalism, since the latter word in English did not yet exist. When Hitler, writing about his youth in *Mein Kampf*, said that "I was a nationalist; but I was not a patriot," he knew exactly what he meant, and so ought we. Patriotism (as George Orwell noted in one of the few extant essays about its distinction from nationalism) is defensive, while nationalism is aggressive; patriotism is rooted to the land, to a particular country, while nationalism appeals to the myth of a people, indeed to a majority; patriotism is traditionalist, nationalism is populist. Patriotism is not a substitute for a religious faith, whereas nationalism often is; it may fill the emotional—and at least superficially spiritual—needs of people. It may be combined with hatred. (As Chesterton wisely said, it is not love, which is personal and particular, but hatred that unites otherwise disparate men. "The jingo nationalist," said Duff Cooper, "is always the first to denounce his fellow countrymen as traitors.")

One hundred years ago it seemed that nationalism and socialism were antitheses, respectively on the far Right and the far Left of the political spectrum. The reason for this was not that of the difference between their economic, or even social, ideas. The reason was that socialists, at that time, were internationalists, anchored in the belief that class-consciousness was stronger than the sense of nationality. They were wrong. The Marxist idea failed—and how thoroughly!—not by 1989, at the end of the 20th century, but in 1914, at its very beginning, when international socialism melted away in the heat of national enthusiasms like a pat of cold margarine in a hot skillet; when it appeared that a German (or a French or a British or an American) workingman had almost nothing in common with workingmen of another nation, whereas he had plenty in common with managers or even industrialists within his own nation. But already a few years before 1914 Mussolini, the young radical socialist and the brains of the Italian Socialist party, discovered that he was an Italian first and a socialist second—that is, a nationalist, and not an internationalist, socialist. All of this corresponded to another important change in the political vocabulary of the Western world. During the 19th (and late 18th) centuries, the words *people* and *popular* belonged only to the Left. Some time after 1890 these terms (in Germany, Austria, and also elsewhere) were beginning to be appropriated by the Right. In 1914, when he broke with the Italian Socialist party, Mussolini named his new nationalist newspaper *Popolo d'Italia*. This was five years before he would announce a



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

new party, the Fascist one, and five years before Hitler joined a small National Socialist—*völkisch*, that is, populist—party in Munich. National socialism (and not only in Germany) was becoming a general phenomenon. The universal application of the adjective "Fascist" to what people see as "the extreme Right" is wrong, and it confuses the issue. The worldwide phenomenon was not Fascism; it was national socialism. Neither Hitler nor Stalin were Fascists; both of them were extreme nationalists, though the latter was careful not to admit this openly.

But this is not an article about the terminology of dictatorships. Hitler was only one of many who realized that nationality was more important than class, and that nationalism was more powerful than internationalism. Hitler was not the founder of National Socialism, not even in Germany; but he recognized the potential marriage of nationalism with socialism, and also the practical—and not merely rhetorical—primacy of nationalism within that marriage. He also knew that old-fashioned capitalism was gone: that belonged to the 19th century. (Before he had come to power someone asked him whether he would nationalize the German industries. "Why should I nationalize them?" he said. "I shall nationalize the people." Whether Krupp, in the 1930s, was nationalized under Hitler or not—and it wasn't—made as little difference as whether General Electric in the 1950s, whose main products under Eisenhower were no longer toasters but space rockets, was nationalized or not.) The economic structure that Hitler had in mind (and achieved) had few of the characteristics of either Marxian or state socialism; but it could not be called capitalist either.

Fifty years later nationalism still remains the most potent political force in the world. In this sense national socialism survived Hitler. Every state in the world has become a welfare state. Whether they call themselves socialist or not does not matter much. Of course the proportions of the compound of nationalism and socialism vary from country to country; but the compound is there, and even where Social Democratic parties rule, it is the national feeling of the people that really matters. What was defeated in 1945, together with Hitler, was his German National Socialism: a cruel and radical and hate-ridden version of nationalist socialism. Elsewhere nationalism and socialism were brought together, reconciled and compounded, without violence and hatred and war. International socialism remains a mirage. We are, all, national socialists now.

That in the history of the 20th century the prevalence of this compound—and the primacy of nationalism within it—is as applicable to the United States as it is to Europe is the main argument of this article, to the explanation and illustration of which I must now turn.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## III

The struggle between American nationalism and American socialism, their animosities and their combinations, are a—if not *the*—principal reality in American political history during the last hundred years.

Because of the American emphasis on equality, Tocqueville already foresaw that all of American "individualism" notwithstanding, democratic societies, including the United States, would eventually tend toward welfare states, administered by huge bureaucracies. Tocqueville (and in this he was not alone among foreign observers of the American scene at the time) noted, too, the extreme pride of Americans in their country and in its political system, including their often hyperbolic rhetoric. But Tocqueville did not yet distinguish between patriotism and nationalism (understandably, since the latter term did not appear until about the middle of the 19th century). Only recently did a thoughtful American historian (James McPherson) draw attention to the evolution of Lincoln's rhetoric during the Civil War, before and at the beginning of which Lincoln is speaking mostly of *Union*, while this usage gradually gives way to his evocation of the American *nation*.

This, of course, corresponds to the coalescing opinion among American historians to the effect that among all of the multifarious and confused causes of the Civil War the principal one was not slavery but secession; what Lincoln—and, indeed, the majority of his countrymen (as the electoral statistics of 1860, too, show)—would not tolerate was the breakup of the powerful nation into two separate states, whether peacefully or not. Notwithstanding all of the bitterness between South and North that continued after the Civil War, no Southerner, after 1865, would advocate secession again: but not only because of the shattering experience of the South's defeat in 1865. After the Civil War the South (partly because of its military traditions) became one of the most, if not the most, nationalistic portions of the United States; and so it remained. The war against Spain in 1898 had the enthusiastic support of the South. Most of the American pacifists and anti-imperialists came not from the South but from the North.

"Your Constitution," Macaulay wrote shortly before the Civil War, "is all sail and no anchor." This proved not to be the case in the long run, but it was true in the short run: the Constitution proved not to be strong enough to avoid the breakup of the Union in 1861. What, then, many Americans recognized after the Civil War was that many of the American freedoms inscribed in the Constitution were either inadequate or undefined or both; that the existential and physical welfare of many Americans was endangered either by corrupt interpretations or by a maleficent neglect of those freedoms; that, in sum, the American democracy had



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

developed its particular social ailments and political problems. The result was what American historians, such as Richard Hofstadter, would describe later as the Age of Reform. The principal propagators—and, often, agents—of those reforms were the Socialists and the Progressives and the Populists. I am listing them not in the chronological order of their appearance, and not according to their political weight (or influence) but in the descending order of their endurance. One hundred years after their appearance the Socialists have, by and large, disappeared from the American political scene. The Progressives, too—recently, for the first time in three hundred years, many Americans have begun to question the very word *progress*, which has lost much of its earlier and universal shine. Yet American populism, albeit in somewhat changed forms, is still very much with us.

The American Socialist party did not get very far (by which I mean that while there was a moderate rise in its fortunes until 1912, the vast majority of the American working class refused to vote for it). This is at least remarkable because in few countries of the world were the unbridled ravages of capitalist greed as evident as in the United States at the time. But the main reason why socialism was unpopular in America was not because individualism or free enterprise or economic freedom were traditional American beliefs strongly embedded in the minds of the American working class. The Socialists were unpopular in America because they were (or at least they had the reputation of being) internationalist—that is, not sufficiently nationalist. American workingmen did not like American capitalists either. In that distrust, too, there was something deeper than an economic motive: they saw Wall Street and the Eastern financial establishment as dangerously cosmopolitan and un-American. (We are accustomed to attributing the origins of this peculiarly American usage of *un-Americanism* to the American right wing, especially after World War I; yet striking American workers would on occasion call their employers "un-American"—for example, as early as 1903, during the Cripple Creek crisis.)

Many American historians, including Richard Hofstadter, thought and wrote that the governing ideology of the era of the robber barons, of untrammeled capitalism in America, was that of Social Darwinism. I am inclined to believe that they were wrong. The belief, and the propagation of "the survival of the fittest" was not a typically American (it was much more typically a German) idea. What Americans took from Darwinism (or, more precisely, a much older American belief that Darwinism seemed to confirm) was the great cloudy idea of Evolution, or call it Progress. The American Progressives, beginning to coalesce around 1880, exercised as they were by the corruptions of capitalism among the fittest of Americans, believed in Evolution wholeheartedly; it was



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inseparable from their belief in, and addiction to, Progress. They believed that when and where American democracy was imperfect, this was owing to insufficient education and to insufficient social and political planning. Consequently they were proponents of progressive improvement: not only of better but also of more government, of progressive education, of progressive law, in the end including international law. Thus, as time went on, the ideas and the propositions of the American Progressives differed less and less from—indeed, they often became identical with—those of American liberals and American Socialists. Many of the Progressive intellectuals became left-wingers. Those were the main reasons for the Progressives' ultimate demise. They, too, were insufficiently nationalist.

The American party, or movement, that was unabashedly nationalist from beginning to end, was Populist. The Populists believed that the trouble with American democracy was that it was not democratic enough, that the people must have more authority, that they must govern and rule. (The Progressives *seemed* to agree—but what they *really* believed was that there ought to be more authority for the educators of the people.) The social, the ethnic, the regional, the religious provenances of the Populists and the Progressives were very different; but for a while they were allied, or at least they were not in direct conflict with each other. From about 1896 to 1912 (with the partial exception of 1904) most Populists voted Democratic while most Progressives were Republicans; but during World War I these relative associations began to wash away. The break between Populists and Progressives came in 1917, when most Progressives (Republicans as well as Democrats) had become committed internationalists, championing the American intervention in the War to End All Wars, while among the minority of congressmen and senators who opposed the war, the majority were actual, or former, Populists. Like their subsequent hero Henry Ford, the Populists incarnated the peculiar American mixture of conservatism and radicalism.

Neither the Populists nor the Progressives knew much history. Henry Ford's famous "History is bunk" as well as the Populist state legislatures' radically nationalist censorship of history textbooks and of history teaching show this; but so does the dictum by Julius Klein, Herbert Hoover's Progressive Assistant Secretary of Commerce in 1928: "Tradition is the enemy of Progress." During their ridiculous confrontation at the Scopes Trial in 1925, William Jennings Bryan, the Populist protagonist, proclaimed his unhistorical belief in the Bible, while Clarence Darrow, the Progressive protagonist, proclaimed his, no less unhistorical, belief in Science. For a brief time—from 1932 until about 1935—American progressivism and American populism seemed to march together again, supporting Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. But



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that soon ceased to be. Roosevelt's most dangerous adversaries were not the candidates whom the Republican party fielded against him in the presidential elections of 1936, 1940, 1944; they were Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin, incarnating the potential of mass movements, populists both. The final, and irrevocable, break between American Populism and American Progressivism would then coincide with the great division among Americans as World War II approached, when the deepest of divisions were not between Republicans and Democrats, not between relative conservatives and relative liberals, not between Right and Left, but between so-called isolationists and so-called internationalists. The ideology of the former was strongly Populist, and of the latter mostly Progressive. The Progressives were mostly Democrats now, American international socialists of a sort. The Populists were American national socialists to a man (or woman).

Here I must emphasize again the concordances of European and American history. During that most decisive and dramatic quarter of our century, 1920 to 1945, the history of Europe *and* of the United States (and of many other parts of the globe, too) was marked by the struggle of three forces. There was Western parliamentary democracy, incarnated by the English-speaking nations and by some states in Western Europe. There was Communism, incarnated and represented by the Soviet Union alone. And there was a new force, radical nationalism, principally (though not solely) incarnated by National Socialist Germany. For a while the latter was the most powerful one; as World War II proved, neither the American-British empires nor the Soviet Union could defeat it; for its destruction the unusual alliance of democracts and Communists was needed. That, however, is not my main point here. The main point is that this triangular contest appeared *within* the politics—that is, within the beliefs and tendencies and allegiances of people—of many nations, including the United States. Despite the crisis of the capitalist order, the American Communists remained a minuscule minority even in 1932 (though not minuscule among American intellectuals); and during the war they were allied with left-wing Democrats—that is, with some of the remnant Progressives. Their main enemies (and, as we have seen, Roosevelt's main enemies) were the nationalist Populists (whom Hitler once, in June 1940, correctly designated as American radical nationalists). Neither the sectarian quarrels among the conventicles of the American Left nor the inchoate character of the two large American political parties must obscure this issue. There were nationalist populists in both parties, including Anglophobes among the Democrats; but Roosevelt's strongest opposition came not from the Left but from the nationalists of the Right—a new kind of Right. Only a few days before Pearl Harbor, Senator Robert A. Taft (who even after the war would



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

claim that the war against Hitler's Germany was a mistake) emphatically said that he was standing for American populism at its best.

The new world that came about with the defeat of Germany and Japan in 1945 may have meant the final defeat and disappearance of American isolationism; but isolationism itself was an imprecise term (most of those who had opposed intervention against Germany and National Socialism were soon enthusiastic advocates of an international crusade against Russia and Communism). That was not really the issue. Hitler and his National Socialism were gone; but nationalism was not. Indeed, nationalism remained the principal political force in the world—and so it is still. Socialism, especially in the United States, ceased to be an issue. By 1948, latest by 1952, the Republican party accepted all of the institutions of the welfare state that had been erected by the New Deal. Since that time, all superficial rhetoric and appearances notwithstanding, the deep differences between the two political parties have never been economic. In every presidential election since 1948, the majority voted for the—seemingly—more nationalist candidate. In 1948, despite the Democrats' increasing unpopularity, the memories of the New Deal were still close enough for Democratic working people to produce for Truman a narrow victory over Dewey (not to speak of the circumstance that Truman gave the impression of being at least as much, if not more, of a solid American than was his opponent). But in 1952 large masses of the same people for whom Roosevelt had provided during the Depression deserted the Democratic party; in 1952 almost *any* Republican could have defeated Stevenson or Truman. Anti-Communism, that essential ingredient of populist nationalism, contributed to that, often and strongly, though not always decisively. Joe McCarthy was a radical nationalist and populist (he once proposed the nationalization of insurance), but people turned away from him after a few years; people voted for John Kennedy in 1960, and they turned down Goldwater in 1964. These were exceptions that prove the rule. In the United States—as also in other countries—most people do *not* always vote for the party or for the candidate who is the most nationalist; but they will *not* vote for a party or for a candidate that does not seem to be sufficiently—or convincingly—nationalist.

This is not the place for an examination of the psychology of American nationalism. We must keep in mind, too—in addition to the earlier stated difference between nationalism and patriotism—that their sentiments often overlap and often within the same person. Nationalism is not always, and not necessarily, wrong. Historically, too, it may be argued that during the 19th century the comparison between the relative nationalism of the candidates was the principal issue in less than half of the presidential elections. Even in 1932, 1936, 1940, 1944, people did



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not vote for Roosevelt because he was (or seemed to be) the more nationalist candidate. Yet it is the—seemingly—insufficient nationalism (together with the increasingly unpopular liberalism) of the Democrats that explains the almost unbroken decline of their presidential fortunes during the last forty years.

Hence the necessary consideration of a more accurate political terminology, reflecting the historical realities of the last one hundred years. Our political commentators and political scientists still say that the American two-party system differs from that of the European democracies, and even from that of England. This may be true: but it is not true enough. Yes: even in England, unlike here, the ideologies and the political advocacies of the two great parties seldom overlap; there have also been great changes in the configurations of the two or three principal English parties during the last hundred years, whereas in the United States the configuration, since 1860, has remained the same: two huge parties, Republicans and Democrats. We do not have much of a Socialist party, and we do not have a radical Nationalist one. What we have are the American compounds of national socialism: *the Republicans who are more nationalist than socialist, and the Democrats who are more socialist than nationalist*—whence the rise of the former and the decline of the latter during the last forty-odd years.

## IV

Much of this corresponds with what may be the most significant development in American politics in the last hundred years. This is the emergence of a "conservative" movement and ideology in the 1950s. (*That* decade—and not the 1960s—was the turning point in the political history and in the character of the institutions of the United States during the second half of this century.) For two hundred years there was no conservative party in the United States. There is one now: the Republicans. The very word *conservative* was avoided by every American politician as late as 1950 (when even Taft said on one occasion that he was not a conservative but an "old-fashioned liberal"); but by the end of the 1950s, Eisenhower, that supreme opportunist, declared that he was a "conservative." That had ceased to be a pejorative, a controversial, or even a dubious term. By 1980 more Americans designated themselves as "conservatives" than as "liberals"—partly because of some of the evident mistakes and excesses of American liberals, partly because of the positive reputation that some American conservatives had acquired, slowly but surely. However, let me repeat: both *conservative* and *liberal* are long outdated terms, well beyond the extent of their first compromising corruptions.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We have seen that, long before the conservatives' appearance, the nationalist populists had moved from the Democratic to the Republican ranks. The American "conservatives" (whose movement began as an unabashedly radical McCarthyite movement) have been overwhelmingly nationalist, and populist too. Thus their propaganda against "Big Government" has been inconsistent. (I am leaving aside the—increasingly significant—argument that our present "conservatives" are opposed to conservation—that is, to an attachment to land that is at least as patriotic as it is "environmental.") They may have argued against bureaucratic extensions of the welfare state—that is, against an American version of state socialism—but they have been enthusiastic advocates of extending the power and the purse of an imperial presidency (the size of the White House staff alone was six times larger under Reagan than under Roosevelt at the peak of World War II), of the FBI, the CIA, and, of course, of the American armed forces. The original core of the American conservatives consisted of the isolationists who had opposed siding with the British against Hitler during World War II; but their isolationism disappeared soon, while their nationalism grew even stronger than it had been before. During the 1950s (as Section Nine of the Republican party platform in 1956 shows: it called for the extension of American air and naval bases "strategically dispersed around the world") the so-called "conservative" party had become the advocate of American intervention throughout the globe, and then into space.

I need not draw further attention to the inaccuracy of the "conservative" usage. Yet it is indisputable that the popular nationalism avowed by the conservatives has often accorded with the preferences of the majority of Americans. That Americans' electoral preferences are the result of their economic motives, that they vote with their pocketbooks, has become less and less true (if it ever was true at all); and so is that other half-truth, that Americans are not really interested in foreign policy—that is, in their country's place in the world. In the midst of the Depression, in 1932, a poll showed that a majority of Americans wanted to increase the size of the armed forces, that they were willing to pay for "defense." As I write this my eye is caught by an article in the *New York Times* (July 14, 1991) stating that 62 percent of the people polled now favor Republicans and only 52 percent favor the Democrats; and while 51 percent say that Democrats, rather than Republicans (only 22 percent state that) are likely to improve the American health-care system, the greatest discrepancy favoring the Republicans is shown in the answers of people to the question: "Which party is more likely to make sure U.S. military defenses are strong?" Sixty-one percent say that it is the Republicans, and only 19 percent say the Democrats—and, as some of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the comments of the people interviewed show, *that* is what really counts.

The history of American nationalism is still to be written. Whoever writes it ought to be aware of its varieties and mutations, including the differences between a traditionalist patriot and a radical nationalist, and including the differences (so often confused by historians of immigration) between nativism and nationalism, among other things. That historian must be aware, too, that at the very time when "nationalism" became a popular slogan in the United States, proposed as it was by Theodore Roosevelt, it meant something quite different from the nationalism current in our day. Despite Roosevelt's Big Stick reputation, his propagation of an American nationalism was not at all populist, and his employment of the term had nothing to do with foreign policy. By emphasizing an "American nationalism" Theodore Roosevelt was anxious to promote the cohesion of the nation, worried as he was (and, let me add, worried as we ought to be) about the changing ethnic composition of the American nation. That other, more recent, phenomenon, when American nationalism was equated with anti-Communism, is largely over, too. The history of Reagan's foreign policy alone proves that; but the unabashedly sentimental and emotional nationalism represented by Ronald Reagan is still widespread and strong (as the excessive popular reaction to the Gulf War shows). Indeed it seems that nationalism, with its symbols and its functional rhetoric, may be the only religion that masses of otherwise inchoate Americans have in common.

The appeal of socialism is long gone, and nationalism is as strong as ever. Within their compound, nationalism proved to be the more enduring element. However, it behooves this historian to propose a last observation. Nationalism, though still strong, will not last forever—surely not in the forms in which it has appeared during most of the 20th century. That century is now over. The thesis of this article was that while in the 19th century the near-universal political phenomenon was the struggle between conservatism and liberalism, leading to their eventual overlapping, in the 20th century it was that of the relationship of nationalism and socialism. That will not last forever, for two reasons. One is the near-final completion of the earlier socialist agenda: since the welfare state is a universal reality now, the conflicts and the compounds of nationalism and socialism have lost much of their meaning. The other is the gradual fading of the power of the state, by which I mean the authority of centralized government.

All over the world, especially in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe, but within the regionalist movements in Western Europe, too, nationalism has been devolving into ethnic tribalism. Given the changing ethnic composition of the American people, there is, alas, reason to



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fear that American nationalism, too, may devolve into tribal struggles of a peculiarly American kind. (Another factor may be the gradual growth of supernational bureaucratic authorities—the ultimate authority and efficiency of which, however, are still far away.) But this question about the primacy of the state appeared even earlier. It marked one of the few significant differences between the Fascist and National Socialist dictatorships. To Hitler, the populist, "the people" came before "the state," both hierarchically and historically as he once said ("In the beginning was the *Volk*, and only then came the *Reich*"). To Mussolini, Fascist nationalism meant the complete obedience of people to the state. Yet the centralized state was, after all, a product of the Modern Age, beginning four or five centuries ago. (Consider the title of Burckhardt's famous chapter in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*: "The State as a Work of Art." It surely is not much of a work of art now.) And now, when not only the 20th century but much of the entire so-called Modern Age is passing, there are many signs suggesting that something else will replace the authority and the power of the centralized and sovereign national states of the world. We are, all, national socialists now; but not for long.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# The Middle East Crisis in Historical Perspective

BERNARD LEWIS

ONE OF THE MOST DISQUIETING FEATURES of the Gulf crisis and war was the surge of emotional support for Saddam Hussein among Arabs, and to some extent also in the broader Muslim world. This was by no means universal. Most Arab and other Muslim governments supported the U.N. decisions and the U.S.–led action, but they participated with extreme caution and showed keen awareness of powerful trends of opinion in their own countries, among their own populations, in support of Saddam Hussein and against his opponents—even against his victims. This support was expressed not only in the Arab world, but also, more openly because of the greater freedom that they enjoyed, among the Arab and Muslim immigrant communities in Western Europe and North America.

It is at first sight astonishing that anyone should choose so ogreish a hero. To quote two comparisons sometimes made by his critics, Saddam Hussein is like Hitler, but without Hitler's charm, like Stalin, but without Stalin's appeal, however perverted, to noble human ideals. He has appeared on the world stage as a tyrant to his own people, a plunderer to his neighbors, a terrorist to his remoter friends and enemies alike.

Even in specifically Arab and Muslim terms, Saddam would at first sight appear an unlikely candidate for the role of hero. By his elaborate cult of Babylon and the accompanying reassertion of the pre-Arab and pre-Islamic identity of Iraq, and by his single-minded pursuit of what he perceived as Iraqi national interests, he has violated one of the basic rules of the pan-Arab canon and committed the sin of regional particularism. Egyptian leaders have from time to time been excoriated in other Arab countries for the equivalent offense and accused of Pharaonism—a

✪ BERNARD LEWIS is the Cleveland E. Dodge Professor of Near Eastern Studies Emeritus at Princeton University and the author, most recently, of *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. This essay was the Il Mulino lecture, delivered in Bologna, Italy, in September 1991 and published, in Italian, in the November issue of *Il Mulino*.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crime against Arab unity. His stance in the 1980s as the champion of secular modernism against the religious fanaticism of the Islamic revolution and as the defender of the old order of the Gulf sheikhs against social subversion made him an object of anathema to both religious and social reformers. His armed invasion of Kuwait broke the rules, not only of the United Nations, but also—perhaps more to the point—of the Arab League pact, and violated one of the strongest taboos of inter-Arab politics; that however great and deep their differences, Arab states do not go to war against other Arab states in settlement of disputes. His espousal as role model of the pagan tyrant Nebuchadnezzar—at best an equivocal figure, even in Muslim tradition—aptly symbolized all these policies and actions.

All this did not prevent a significant part of the Arab and Muslim world from accepting and soon acclaiming him as a hero of Arabism, of revolution, and even—*quia absurdum*—of Islam. Some were ready to condone and even approve his invasion, occupation, and annexation of Kuwait. Others, while deploring these actions, were willing to accept the fait accompli, and reserved their main indignation for the efforts of the coalition—described by them as an unholy alliance of Western imperialists and their Arab clients—to dislodge him. One is left wondering what logic could have made the heir of Nebuchadnezzar and scourge of Khomeini a warrior in the holy war for Islam; the violator of a peaceful neighboring Arab state, a paladin of Arabism; and the paid defender of the Gulf sheikhs, a revolutionary leader for social change.

A study of the pro-Saddam movement in its various aspects and expressions makes it clear that the ultimate driving force was hostility to the West and hence also to those seen as allies or supporters of the West. This in turn raises the obvious question—why should there be so deep and violent a hostility to the West?

There has been no lack of answers to this question, and there is no difficulty in drawing up a long series of grievances held by the Arab and Muslim world against Western powers. Middle Easterners, discussing this question, will usually lay the main stress on those grievances that concern them directly; Western observers, on the other hand, are inclined to lay the greatest stress on those grievances that can be satisfied at the expense of others. An alarming feature is that the resolution of specific problems, the removal of specific grievances, seems to bring at best a temporary alleviation, and often an aggravation, of this hostility. Imperial rule—British, French, Italian—in Arab countries was once seen as the principal cause of Arab hostility, and it was widely believed, and still more widely asserted, that with the ending of imperial rule, this hostility would disappear. More than forty years have passed since the ending of imperialist rule—indeed, in most Arab



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

countries, more years than that rule itself lasted, and during that time, some Arab states have established an imposing financial and physical presence in the Western world. But the hostility remains or recurs and sometimes reaches new heights. To understand what has been happening, it is necessary to look back over a longer period and to explore the deeper levels of the historic process.

Another of Saddam Hussein's heroes was the Egyptian president, Gamāl 'Abd al-Nāsir, who rose from being a local Egyptian ruler to being the loved and acclaimed leader of the Arab world. The circumstances of this transformation are worth a closer look. The key date is September 1955, when the governments of Egypt and Czechoslovakia, the latter at that time a Soviet satellite, announced to the world that they had concluded an agreement for the supply of Czechoslovak arms to Egypt. This incursion of an Eastern-bloc power into what had until then been an exclusively Western preserve was clearly a slap in the face for the West in general and the United States in particular. What is significant is not so much the deal itself as the wave of ecstasy with which it was greeted across the Arab world. The Syrian, Lebanese, and Jordanian parliaments at once adopted, by acclamation, resolutions of congratulation to Nāsir, and even Nūrī al-Sa'īd of Iraq, a well-known friend and supporter of the West, was constrained by public opinion in his own country to join the chorus of congratulation. All this enthusiasm, and the rapturous and almost unanimous approval of the Arabic press, were not due to any pro-Soviet or pro-communist sentiment, nor to any desire to bring Soviet power into the Middle Eastern region. The arms deal was welcomed, first and last, as an action against the West—an important step towards breaking the Western monopoly of external influence in the region and a gratifying blow to what was seen as Western arrogance.

One suggestion made at the time was that this action was a protest against the long British occupation of Egypt and a reaction against British imperial domination. But British imperial domination of Egypt had come to an end some time previously, and the last British troops were withdrawn from the Suez Canal on April 2, 1955. One would hardly expect so great a degree of passion over an issue already resolved.

Some later commentators saw this enthusiasm for the Soviets as a reaction to American support for Israel. But this is reading history backwards. The United States and the Soviet Union competed, and in some measure cooperated, in securing the majority of votes that passed the U.N. resolution for the partition of Palestine in 1947, and the Soviet Union preceded the United States by some time in according *de jure* recognition to the Jewish state. More important, it was the speedy supply of arms from the same Soviet surrogate, Czechoslovakia, which enabled the infant state to survive its first war in 1948. The small quantity of arms



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smuggled to Israel from the United States at that time was due to private and illegal initiatives in defiance of an otherwise strictly enforced official U.S. arms embargo. American financial and military aid to Israel was on a very small scale and did not reach substantial proportions until the late sixties and the seventies. The American strategic relationship with Israel, which began in 1962, and became significant only after 1967, was a consequence, not a cause, of Soviet penetration and of growing Soviet influence in country after country in the Arab world. And, in the meantime, most of the Arab states have shown a noteworthy indifference to the plight of the Palestinians, and appear to have no use for them, except as an occasional distraction for their own downtrodden peoples, or as a stick with which to beat the West.

Another of Saddam Hussein's heroes, and an acclaimed figure in present-day Iraq, was Rashīd ʿAlī al-Gaylānī, a politician who with military support seized power in Baghdad in April 1941. He established a pro-Axis regime and sought help from Germany and Italy. The help was too little and too late, and his regime was overthrown by British and British-led forces after six weeks. A committee formed at the time in Vichy-controlled Syria to mobilize support for the Rashīd ʿAlī regime, was the nucleus that later developed into the Baʿth party.

Rashīd ʿAlī was by no means the only Axis supporter in the Arab world. One of his closest associates, the Mufti of Jerusalem Hājj Amīn al-Husaynī, joined and helped him in Iraq and after the fall of his regime became his companion in exile in Germany. Nāsir, Sādāt, and several other members of the officers' group that seized power in Egypt in 1952 had at least been sympathizers and some of them active workers for the Axis. The Mufti had declared his support and offered his help immediately after Hitler's accession to power in 1933, and during the war years the rulers of the Third Reich received more offers of help than they found it expedient to accept.

The same questions may be put concerning this earlier support for the enemies of the West, and the same answers have indeed been offered. Israel did not yet exist, but the growth of Jewish settlement in mandatary Palestine was already a cause of concern to Palestinians and to a growing extent to other Arabs. Nazi propaganda was explicitly, and to some listeners, gratifyingly anti-Jewish. But it was the policies of the Nazis in Germany and their disciples elsewhere that were the principal cause of Jewish migration to Palestine and of the consequent strengthening of the Jewish community in that country. The Nazis not only provoked and permitted this migration; they even encouraged and facilitated it until the outbreak of war, while the British, in the vain hope of winning Arab goodwill, imposed restrictions. In spite of this, significant numbers of Arabs rallied to the Germans, who sent the Jews to Palestine, rather than to the British, who tried to keep them out.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The British, and to a lesser extent French, presence during the thirties and early forties was of course much more of a factor, and during the war years this presence was vastly increased. It is easy to understand why Arab patriots struggling against British domination should have been eager to establish links with the enemy of their enemy. It is more difficult to see why so many of them should have been willing to embrace a younger, hungrier, rival imperialism that was incomparably more brutal and more contemptuous of all the values that they cherished.

Nazi racism as such cannot have had much appeal for a people who in the Nazi pseudo-science were classified as racial inferiors. Marxist atheism must surely have been repellent to the vast majority of believing, practicing Muslims. Nationalism, as distinct from racism, would have been more familiar, and the fervent nationalism of the Germans and Italians was certainly more intelligible to Arabs than the low-key patriotism of the Western allies—the more so since Germany and Italy had long been cited by pan-Arab writers as models of successful unification. Several Arab states unsuccessfully tried to emulate the achievement of Prussia or Sardinia, and there was no lack of candidates for the role of Bismarck or Cavour or of a sadly misunderstood Garibaldi. The authoritarian philosophies and centralized dictatorships of the Axis and later of the Soviets also seemed models more worthy of imitation than the hated, and when no longer hated, despised democracies of the West. Both fascism (in the thirties and forties) and communism (in the fifties and sixties) had a considerable impact on some groups of Arab intellectuals.

But beyond all these there was and unfortunately still is a profound, pervasive and passionate hatred of the West and all it represents, as a world power, as an ideology, as a way of life, and that hatred is extended to embrace a wide range of local Westernizers and modernizers. It is a hatred so deep that it has led those who feel it to rally to any plausible enemy of the West—even a racist like Hitler who despised Arabs, an atheist like Stalin who suppressed Islam, a gangster like Saddam Hussein who violated every rule of Arab decency and Islamic morality.

The roots of this hatred are old and deep and strong and must be sought in the millennial history of relations between Islam and Christendom—Islam, whose historic center has always been and still is the Middle East, and Christendom, which was for long virtually coterminous with Europe and is so even today with Europe and her daughters.

The first missionary religion with universalist aspirations known to human history was Buddhism. These aspirations were abandoned centuries ago, and Buddhism is now in effect a regional religion, confined to south, southeast, and east Asia. All the other surviving religions, all that is but two, are even more confined, belonging in effect to one country or



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people or at most one region. Judaism is for Jews, Hinduism for Indians, the religions of China for Chinese. They have on occasion expanded into neighboring areas, but claimed no universal mission. These religions may accept recruits but do not seek or encourage them. On the contrary, they are content to allow men and women of other faiths to find their own way to salvation and to God.

The Christian and the Muslim both rejected this view and agreed that there is only one true path to salvation and God. They differed, however, in that each believed that he alone had been shown that path and that he and his fellow believers were the sole custodians of God's final revelation to man. Since the seventh century, Christianity and Islam have faced each other across the Mediterranean and elsewhere—two religions divided less by their differences than by their resemblances. Both claimed the same heritage of prophecy and revelation, though they may have defined it in different terms. Both proclaimed the same duty, to bring the truth to all mankind and induce them to accept it or at least to submit to the authority of those who bring it. Both created rich and versatile civilizations; both also established mighty and far-flung empires. And final irony, both claimed the same human space around the Mediterranean Sea and its hinterland. For some fourteen centuries, two religions, two cultures, two power blocs have lived side by side, in occasional communication and even cooperation, in frequent conflict, in permanent confrontation. Their common origins and parallel aspirations made communication between them possible. They also made it possible for them to exchange insults and abuse meaningfully and effectively. When Christian and Muslim said to each other, "You are an infidel and you will burn in hell" each understood exactly what the other meant and both meant the same thing.

Islam, even more than Christianity, is not only a religion, a system of belief and worship. It is a civilization—an identity, and an allegiance, which remain even when belief is lost and worship abandoned. For the first thousand years, from the first irruption of the Arab, Muslim armies from Arabia into the lands of eastern Christendom until the second Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, Christian Europe was under constant threat of invasion, conquest, and conversion. The first great wave of Arab expansion in the seventh and eighth centuries wrested the Levant, Egypt, and North Africa from Christendom and incorporated them permanently in the realm of Islam. The advance continued into Spain, Portugal, and southern Italy, and even into France, where it seemed for a while that the very survival of western Christendom might be at stake. The Arab threat in the West was finally contained, but another Muslim advance, this time from the east, brought the Islamized Tatars to the domination of Muscovy and eastern Europe and the Ottoman Turks to



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the mastery of Constantinople and the whole of southeastern Europe. In 1480 Sultan Mehmed II, the conqueror of Constantinople, landed forces on the heel of Italy, and only a civil war at home forced their withdrawal. While a Turkish fleet captured Otranto, Turkish cavalry raided the territories of the Venetian Republic, and Turkish artillery pounded the walls of city after city in central Europe.

The Christian Europeans fought back as best they could. Sometimes they failed, as in the ultimately unsuccessful series of counterattacks known in history as the Crusades. These were not, as some anachronistic modern reinterpretations would have it, an early venture in modern imperialism, but rather a Christian attempt to recover former Christian territory lost to the Muslim invader and containing the holy places of Christendom. The war to recover the Holy Land failed; other such wars were more successful, and after a long, hard struggle the Christian peoples of both eastern and southwestern Europe succeeded in overthrowing and expelling their former Muslim masters and restoring Christian rule. The Spaniards and the Portuguese ended almost eight centuries of Moorish domination in the Iberian peninsula; the Russians threw off what is known in their history as "the Tatar yoke." At both ends, the triumphant Christians followed their fallen masters whence they had come—the Portuguese and Spaniards into Africa and beyond, the Russians into Asia.

It was this movement of recovery, reconquest, and counterattack that inaugurated the great expansion of Europe known to Europeans as the Age of Discovery, and that resulted in the establishment, for a while, of worldwide European domination. But that domination took some time to achieve and even then was limited in the main to the remote periphery of the Islamic world. At the center, Islam remained a mighty power and, spearheaded by the Ottoman Turks, still seemed to threaten the very heart of Europe. Muslim fleets still dominated much of the Mediterranean. Well into the seventeenth century, Barbary corsairs were still raiding the coasts of the British Isles and once, in 1627, even reached Iceland. Almost to the end of the seventeenth century, Turkish pashas still governed in Buda and Belgrade, while Turkish armies were preparing their second attack on Vienna.

It was the last, and this one, unlike the first, which introduced a century and a half of stalemate, ended in unequivocal defeat. For the first time ever, the hitherto invincible Ottoman armies were driven back in disarray. For the first time ever the Ottoman sultan, accustomed to dictating terms to a defeated foe, was compelled by his victorious Christian enemies to sign a humiliating peace and to relinquish important territories.

This disaster, at once military and political, came as a profound shock



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to a government and people accustomed to looking down on the rest of the world from a pinnacle of—as they saw it—unassailable religious and military superiority. It was the first of a series of such shocks, growing steadily in magnitude, extent, and force. In the north, the Austrian victories opened the way for the far more dangerous Russians. They in turn expanded into the lands of Islam—to the Black Sea, where they annexed the old Tatar Muslim kingdom of the Crimea; to the Caucasus and Transcaucasia, and to central Asia, creating a new empire from which they pressed ever harder on the Ottomans and their Persian neighbors. In south and southeast Asia, the maritime powers of the West no longer came just to trade but also to rule, and were establishing what ultimately became the Portuguese, Dutch, and British empires in Asia and Africa. Increasingly, the Islamic Middle East, Turkish, Persian, and Arab alike, was caught in a pincer's grip between the Russians in the north and the West Europeans approaching the south from their new possessions in Asia. At the end of the eighteenth century, with the arrival of General Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt, the Christian attack was reaching to the very heart of the Islamic world. The French occupation of Egypt was of brief duration and seems to have had limited immediate effect. But it was ended by British not by Muslim power and marked the beginning of a period of Anglo-French rivalry for trade, for influence, and ultimately, during a brief period in the twentieth century, for direct control.

The debate among Muslims about what had gone wrong and how to put it right began immediately after the retreat from Vienna and has continued—with increasing anguish and urgency—to the present day. At first and for some time, the debate was limited to the Turks who had borne the main brunt, while the Persians, and to an even greater extent the Arabs, were sheltered from reality behind the barrier of the Ottoman Empire, still, even in its decline, a formidable military power. They were thus able to cherish—as we have all done at one time or another—the illusion of the immeasurable and immutable superiority of their way of life. By the late twentieth century, such illusions were no longer possible, and people even in the remotest fastnesses of the Islamic world were aware of the changed balance of power between Christendom and Islam and were feeling the effects of that change in every aspect of their daily lives.

The impact of the West, which for this purpose includes both America and Russia, on non-Western civilizations affected many besides the Muslims and notably the ancient civilizations of India and China. In the encounter between the West and Islam, there was an element lacking in the parallel encounters between the West and the other Asian civilizations—the element of previous experience, and the memories



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and attitudes which that experience bequeathed to both sides. The Hindus had never conquered Spain or crossed the Pyrenees; the Chinese had never conquered Constantinople or crossed the Danube, and neither had offered a new revelation and a new scripture to supersede the Bible. Christians and Indians, Christians and Chinese met each other as almost total strangers. Christians and Muslims met each other as old neighbors and for the most part, adversaries, and each carried a load of prejudices about the other. This made the new Christian ascendancy particularly galling for Muslims. It also made it far more difficult for Muslims to learn about new ways from Christian teachers. There were nevertheless some, at first few, then increasing numbers, who were willing to make the effort.

To begin with, the problem was seen as purely military. The infidels were doing better, the Muslims were doing worse in the battlefield. It was therefore necessary to study and where appropriate to adopt the weapons and methods of the infidel. This raised other problems that were well described by one of the most acute military minds of his time, Count Maurice de Saxe, who defined the Ottoman predicament in these words:

> Among all nations it is difficult to abandon old ways, whether through pride, through indolence or through foolishness. Good ways take an infinite time to penetrate, and sometimes even when everybody is convinced of their usefulness, nevertheless they often abandon them to follow custom and routine. . . . The Turks today are in the same case. What they lack is not valor, not numbers, not riches; but rather, order, discipline, and *"la manière de combattre."*

Before long, the Turks themselves became aware of these and of other problems in their military reforms. A modern army needs modern officers—and this required educational reform. Modern weaponry and logistics involved technological education and change. Most difficult of all, a modern army could no longer be maintained on feudal lines, but demanded ever-increasing infusions of cash.

To accomplish these changes, the Ottomans imported European expert advisers and instructors. The first who came were renegades and adventurers. They were followed, with portentous consequences, by military missions sent by their home governments. To benefit from their foreign guides, it became necessary for the first time for Muslims to learn the hitherto despised languages of the Frankish barbarians. This in turn facilitated the next stage—the sending of students to Europe. Learning European languages for such practical needs as might arise had previously been left to foreign or marginal elements—to renegades from Europe or native Christians and Jews with some Western connections.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now the masters of the empire themselves found it necessary to acquire this hitherto despised skill. Some of them learned to speak and also read, first Italian, then French, then other languages, and thus to come into direct contact with European thought and European ways. By the nineteenth century, knowledge of a major European language was becoming increasingly useful, in some areas indispensable for a successful career.

Increased contact with the West opened the way to new knowledge, particularly after the establishment of a lively newspaper press in Turkish, Persian, Arabic, and other languages. With this came a growing awareness of Western strength in the world and an increasing realization that the sources of that strength lay not only in superior weaponry and tactics but also in many other things.

In the course of the nineteenth century, more and more Muslim thinkers identified the principal problems of their own society as ignorance, poverty, and arbitrary rule, and tried to understand and adapt the European remedies for these problems—education; economic development, especially through industry; political freedom, and the laws by which it is maintained. In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, far-reaching changes were attempted and some of them accomplished. In the areas under direct imperial rule, change was relatively slow. Imperialist regimes are usually cautious and conservative and try to work with rather than against the old establishments. In independent Muslim states, reforming rulers and ministers carried through a far more rapid and extensive westernization of the legal system and the governmental apparatus and of secondary and higher education. Some also made a valiant effort to modernize the infrastructure and develop the economy. In these reforms they were encouraged and sometimes helped by the European powers who seized the economic and political opportunities that these changes offered to them. For the more enthusiastic modernizers, officially sponsored change was never fast enough. Already in the late nineteenth century, there were opposition groups, some of them in exile. In the twentieth century, the Persian Revolution of 1906 and the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 were the harbingers of a long series of seizures of power, mostly, though not exclusively, by military officers, the declared purpose of which was to achieve greater freedom and to expedite necessary reforms.

The source of these new ideas and practices was manifestly and almost exclusively Western, and when the imported machinery broke down, in either the literal or figurative sense, it was natural and human that the blame should be placed with the original suppliers rather than the local handlers. The Egyptian constitution, for example, was adapted from that of Belgium and provided for a limited parliamentary monarchy.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When things went badly wrong, Egyptians very naturally judged parliamentary institutions not by the Belgian or other West European originals, but by the local imitation administered by King Fārūq and the pashas.

In general, the Muslim reaction to the West, and to Western ideas and institutions and aspirations, has fluctuated between response and rejection. Both have always been present among different elements in the population. The interaction and relative strength of the two have differed from country to country and from period to period according to local circumstances. Response has meant a genuine respect and understanding for Western culture and a desire to adopt and adapt selected elements of that culture in a harmonious blend with their own. This does not mean submission to Western rule—on the contrary, the struggle against Western domination was often inspired by such Western notions as personal freedom, human rights, and national self-determination. For the rejectionists, these selfsame Western ideas and institutions were either pagan or Christian and therefore anti-Islamic, and their purpose was to undermine and de-Islamize the Islamic world. The remedy was to return to authentic Islam as seen in an often idealized past and to restore the rule of the God-given holy law. When things go badly—when the political talisman doesn't work and the economic panacea doesn't cure—it is natural that the rejectionists should find a ready audience for their doctrine that the whole Westernizing movement was a disastrous error and that the only salvation for Muslims lies in a return to Islam.

There can be no doubt that things have gone badly in recent years and that modern methods have for the most part not worked. Modern government has brought not freedom but tyranny, far worse than the traditional autocracies in that it is not limited by traditional constraints and has at its disposal all the modern means of surveillance and repression. Modern military methods, introduced and applied at an immense cost in blood and treasure, have with very few exceptions brought not victory but humiliating defeat. Apart from a small elite, modern economic methods have brought not wealth, but poverty, and the impoverished masses have been made more numerous by modern science and more aware of their poverty by modern media. Even more powerful than actual harm are the wounded pride and outraged morality of those who see with horror how Western ideas, Western practices, Western fashions are destroying the very fabric of Muslim government, Muslim society, and even the innermost sanctuary, the Muslim family. It is surely significant that one of the most widely and frequently repeated grievances of the Muslim fundamentalists is the emancipation of women and the consequent damage to propriety and decency.

It is hard to be overshadowed, worse to be dominated by neighbors



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who flaunt and exploit their superior power, superior wealth, and superior knowledge and intrude themselves into every aspect of your private as well as your public life. It is even harder when these neighbors are old and familiar and, for many centuries, ending not so long ago, were themselves overshadowed in all these and many other respects, in the glorious days when Muslims led mankind in the arts and sciences of civilization. In times of real distress as well as wounded pride, it is hardly surprising that a message of hate and vengeance was eagerly received, even if it came from a Hitler, a Stalin, or a Saddam Hussein.

Very recently there have been signs that in some countries, at least in some quarters, the mood of rejection may be passing and giving way once again to a new mood of acceptance and cooperation. The hatred of America is not due simply to this or that American action or policy, but is the consequence—the inevitable consequence—of America's leadership of the hated West. That hatred is now being modified by a new interest in American political institutions and ideas and, in particular, in the notion of freedom secured by law. One of the most helpful signs is the emergence of new intellectuals in Arab countries who are willing to look closely and critically at their own societies and to do so without attributing all blame for all failure to some external *diabolus ex machina.*

And there have been many failures—poverty both moral and material, tyranny both political and social, backwardness both cultural and technological, which these new intellectual critics have not feared to call by their names and for which they have tried to find causes and remedies.

In the early days of Western impact on the Islamic world, the question was often put in the form of a direct comparison between Europe and Islam. Why, asked Muslim writers, did the Islamic world remain poor, weak, and backward, while Europe grew richer, stronger, and ever more advanced? Why could not the Muslims, who had once preceded and led Europe in so many fields of human endeavor, keep up with them now? The question proved unanswerable, principally because it was badly put. In general, it is much more difficult to explain why things do not happen than why they do happen. What was remarkable, and in need of explanation, was not the slow pace of Islamic progress, which was much the same as in the rest of the non-Western world, but rather the extraordinarily swift and extensive rise of the West during the last few centuries. Western historians have of course examined the phenomenal rise of the West and attributed it to a variety of causes—the Renaissance, the Reformation, rainfall, readily accessible sources of energy, metals, technology, the discovery of America, the Scientific Revolution, and others. Few of these, and certainly not the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

combination of all of them, could be found in any non-Western society, and the fate of the Islamic world was not significantly different from that of the other non-Western civilizations of south and east Asia. A similar discrepancy may be seen in the Asian acceptance and Muslim rejection of Western art and music.

Today, however, the question is being asked in a new and more relevant, and therefore more painful, form. Why has the Islamic world not been able to parallel the economic and political modernization of these other non-Western civilizations? The success of Japan is unique, but others are advancing on the same road. Korea is now a major economic power, and the Chinese in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore have shown what they can do when not hamstrung by Marxist philosophy and communist economics. Even in mainland China, they have made substantial progress in modernization and development. Of the successor states of the British Empire in India, the Indian republic, with a population of daunting religious and ethnic diversity, has managed to maintain democratic institutions, while the two Muslim states, Pakistan and Bangladesh, despite their far greater ethnic and religious homogeneity, have staggered, with at best brief intervals of democratic rule, from dictatorship to dictatorship. Of the forty-three member states of the World Islamic Conference, only those endowed by chance with oil have created wealth and significantly raised the standard of living of their people, and only Turkey can qualify as a democracy, by the simple but effective test of having changed its government several times by due process of election. Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Indian scientists are now part of the world scientific community, to which they make a significant contribution. That of the Muslim world, with its billion inhabitants, is still embarrassingly small.

The movement for change began with an awareness of weakness and a consequent desire for strength. In time it was realized that to be strong one must be prosperous, and to be prosperous one should be free. The search for strength, for prosperity, and, ultimately, for freedom still goes on. But prosperity—the experience of the oil-rich states notwithstanding—will not be found in Ali Baba's cave or summoned by Aladdin's lamp, nor will the realm of Islam be made free by some warrior-hero on horseback.

Muslims—especially but not exclusively Western-educated Muslim intellectuals—are well aware of these facts and profoundly concerned about their implications. They are acutely conscious of the contrast between the glorious past and the inglorious present of their society, and of the still more painful contrast between the promise and the achievement of the thinkers and leaders, both reformers and reactionaries, who have guided and led them. There is by now a vast and growing literature on the causes of the Muslim malaise and the means of resolving it.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Basically, these writings fall into two groups, whose attitudes are expressed in two questions. The first is "What did we do wrong?" The second is "Who did this to us?" The first leads naturally and inevitably to the follow-up question "How do we put it right?" The second leads to delusions and fantasies and conspiracy theories—indeed, the most dangerous enemies of the Muslim peoples at this time are those who assure them that in all their troubles the fault is not in themselves but in open or occult hostile forces. Such beliefs can only lead to resentment and frustration, to an endless, useless succession of bigots and tyrants and to a role in world history aptly symbolized by the suicide bomber. In the first of these questions, for those who have the courage to ask it, and the vision to answer, lies hope for the future and for a new dawn of Muslim creativity.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# *Weeping Cherries*

MARGARET HOLLEY

Imported from the Orient,
seventeen weeping cherry trees
line the drive along the old summer hotel,
now a preparatory school for girls,

its turrets topped by the steeple
of the neighboring Presbyterian church
where, in 1905, Bryn Mawr freshman
Miss Marianne Moore

of Carlisle, Pennsylvania,
entered her name in the registry.
Everything here comes from somewhere else,
it seems, even the voices

of the choir tonight
rehearsing Duruflé's *Requiem*
as if someone had opened a window in heaven;
even the mist, tasting of cumulus

blown in from the Carolinas,
drifting under the streetlamps, each droplet
bearing its seeds of dust and light;
even the long ribbons of water



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

making the woodflesh
open its mouths in flower,
magic out of A Thousand and One Nights,
the "singing tree" that Miss Moore

rightly called "a tree of knowledge"
grown up like the held and moving chord
of the moment; and even we, who live here now,
having risen from the dead

into a such world, with these weeping trees,
this black avenue silver with rain
and a grace never imagined
in quite this way before.

MARGARET HOLLEY's first book of poems, *The Smoke Tree*, won the 1991 Bluestem Award and was published in October by the Bluestem Press. Her second book, *The Sleeper*, will be published by Copper Beech Press in the fall of 1992.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# *Amadeus* and Mozart

## Setting the Record Straight

A. PETER BROWN

"FOR THE RESPECT HIS WORKS have commanded of musicians, and the popularity they have enjoyed among wider audiences, he is probably the most admired composer in the history of Western music." With this appraisal the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, published in 1980, begins its magisterial article on Beethoven. More than a decade later one might not apply this statement to the Teutonic Goliath but to the David of Mozart. Not only is this year (1991) the bicentennial of Mozart's death, it also comes at a time when his pristine classical image has become the preferred taste over Beethoven's more extroverted expression.

Turn your channel to PBS, where Hugh Downs or Peter Ustinov is narrating a Mozart special. Turn to one of the commercial channels, and Mozart's Piano Concerto K.466 and "Little" G Minor Symphony K.183/173dB are selling MacIntosh computers, *Don Giovanni* gives class to Cheer laundry detergent, *The Marriage of Figaro* hawks the Sirocco automobile, the Requiem's Lacrymosa seemingly sanctifies Lee Jeans, and another piano concerto (K.482) perks Maxwell House coffee. The recovery of a Mozart symphony, even if juvenilia, receives front-page coverage from the *New York Times*. Dealers and collectors will go to any extreme for a piece of the action; Mozart autographs sell at the same prices as fine paintings, and dealers in one case dismembered the "Andretter" Serenade K.185, retailing it piecemeal for greater profit. *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* now rival the box-office receipts of *La Bohème* and *Madame Butterfly*.

This popularization of Mozart did not come from the opera houses or concert halls—its most direct beneficiaries—but from the stage and screen. More than any other factor, the Mozart mania of the 1980s was initiated by Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus*. It and the subsequent film

✪ A. PETER BROWN teaches in the School of Music at Indiana University. He is the author of *Joseph Haydn's Keyboard Music: Sources and Style* and *Performing Haydn's "The Creation."* His recently published edition of *The Creation* has been recorded by Christopher Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

directed by Milos Forman did more for Mozart's case than anything else in the two hundred years since the composer's death. *Amadeus* ran in London, Washington, and New York and was translated into German and Hungarian, among other languages, as it entered the repertoire of the Burgtheater in Vienna and the Nemzeti Színház in Budapest. Shaffer continually revised the stage version with, in his words, "a nearly obsessive pursuit of clarity, structural order, and drama. . . . One of the faults which I [Shaffer] believe existed in the London version was simply that Salieri has too little to do with Mozart's ruin." For the film version, Shaffer and Forman again revised the script, not only for the new medium but also for a larger and less-sophisticated audience. Both men agreed that

> we were not making an objective "Life of Wolfgang Mozart." This cannot be stressed too strongly. Obviously, *Amadeus* on the stage was never intended to be a documentary biography of the composer and the film is even less of one. . . . But we are also blatantly claiming the grand license of the story teller to embellish his tale with fictional ornament, and—above all—to supply it with a climax whose sole justification need be that it enthralls his audience and emblazons his theme.

Even more so than on the stage, the film translated what could be accepted as compelling drama into what for many viewers became the time, place, and characters of history. The caveats published with the stage play were never imprinted on celluloid; fiction was never segregated from truth.

*Amadeus* centers on the deep envy of the imperial court composer Antonio Salieri of Mozart's godlike gifts as a composer. Despite Mozart's uncouthness and immaturity, he produced one work after another that seemed divinely sponsored as they transcended his own personality. He was beloved of God—truly befitting the name "Amadeus." Both the play and the film concern themselves with the most significant decade in the composer's life, beginning with his dismissal from the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg in 1781 until his death ten years later. During this time Mozart resided in Vienna and became a composer free from the daily obligations of court appointments, but encumbered by the quest for financial stability. In this decade Mozart composed a large number of works astonishing for their quality. *Amadeus* sets much of its action at the Viennese court in order to focus on Salieri's rivalry with Mozart. Though some of its situations might be plausible, much of it is an almost surrealistic distortion of court life and the life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Today, more than seven years after the film's release, musicologists are still asked about Wolfgang, Constanze, and Leopold Mozart, the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Emperor Joseph II, and Antonio Salieri. Were they really like that? In this "the Mozart year" of 1991, it is time to review this portrayal of a cultural icon in order to begin setting the record straight.

"Fictional ornament" understates the gulf between what was the invention of the authors and historical truth. No doubt both Shaffer and Forman knew the facts of Mozart's biography and were even familiar with some of the historical controversies. Their metamorphosis of Mozart's life was analogous to Da Ponte's transformation of Beaumarchais's play *The Marriage of Figaro* into an operatic libretto: the length was made to fit the time frame of the medium, the number of characters was reduced, and the situations streamlined and combined.

Yet, the settings and motivations of the characters might still be recreations of eighteenth-century life. If Shaffer and Forman had accomplished or even intended this goal, much of the power of their film would have been diminished for today's audience. Motivations, goals, and feelings, or at least the way they were expressed and retained by men and women of Mozart's day, would have been decidedly different from ours. For example, Wolfgang and Constanze Mozart had six children brought to full term, and only two survived into adulthood, a ratio common for the time. If their reaction to the death of each child were on the same scale as the reaction to a child's death in the 1990s, they would have been in an almost perpetual state of mourning during the decade of their marriage.

Though titled *Amadeus*, it is the character of Antonio Salieri (1750–1825) who remains at the center of Shaffer's work. Salieri held high posts in the Viennese imperial musical establishment from 1774 until 1824. In his last years he suffered from senility. Among the rumors circulating in Vienna around 1824 was one saying that Salieri had said he poisoned Mozart. The tale reached Beethoven and many others. In 1825 Salieri's two attendants attested that they had never heard such words from their charge, and a friend of Mozart's physician reported that Wolfgang had died of a fever that was epidemic at that time in Vienna. From an unproved premise Shaffer developed this, the central character in *Amadeus*, as one obsessed by and murderously jealous of Mozart's genius.

Constanze, Mozart's widow, fanned the rumor's flame by endorsing it; she also believed that Salieri had plotted against her husband. But it is more likely, if any hot hostility even existed, that Salieri was protecting his own turf within the imperial establishment. If a court cabal had been so powerful and Salieri so maniacal about preventing Mozart's success, neither *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, nor *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Così fan tutte* would have been composed for or performed



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the court theaters. In addition, Salieri would certainly not have shared a double operatic bill at the Schönbrunn palace with Mozart in February 1786 if such bad blood existed between them. Furthermore, Mozart did receive a court appointment as Kammermusicus in December 1787 and at the time of his death was to be appointed Kapellmeister at St. Stephen's Cathedral. Salieri even attended a performance of *The Magic Flute* on October 13, 1791, reportedly visited Mozart the day before he died, and, according to one account was a mourner at the funeral on December 6.

If Salieri had been an obsessively jealous personality, as shown in *Amadeus,* there would have been many opportunities to observe it. As court composer and later imperial Kapellmeister he taught many gifted students. Beethoven studied with him the setting of Italian texts, and Salieri early on recognized Schubert's special gifts: "That one knows everything; he composes operas, songs, quartets, symphonies and whatever you will." In June 1816 the revered Kapellmeister celebrated fifty years in the service of the emperor, which prompted Schubert to enter a private and honest tribute in his diary:

> It must be fine and inspiring for a musician to have all his pupils gathered about him, to see how each strives to give of his best in honor of the master's jubilee, to hear in all their compositions the simple expressions of Nature, free from all that eccentricity which tends to govern most composers nowadays, and for which we are indebted—almost wholly—to one of our greatest German musicians [Beethoven]. That eccentricity confuses and confounds, without distinguishing between them, tragic and comic, sacred and profane, pleasant and unpleasant, heroic strains and mere noise; it engenders in people not love but madness; it rouses them to scornful laughter instead of lifting up their thoughts to God. To have banned these extravagances from the circle of his pupils, and to have kept them, instead, at the pure source of Nature must be the greatest satisfaction to a musician who, following in Gluck's steps, seeks his inspiration in Nature alone, despite the unnatural influences of the present day.

Anselm Hüttenbrenner reported that Salieri always spoke of Mozart "with exceptional respect," and the two composers were on friendly enough terms so that Salieri would loan Mozart scores from the court library. Apart from Constanze's remark, there exists no independent evidence to conclude that Salieri and Mozart were on bad terms. On the contrary, their relationship may have been a healthy professional one.

According to the film, the basis of Salieri's jealousy was his desire, while still a boy in Italy, to become "a great composer like Mozart." That Salieri in old age doubts his confessor's aphorism that "all men are equal in God's eyes," by comparing himself again to Mozart is a stroke of dramatic brilliance. But the idea, postulated around 1760 by an Italian youth, of a "great composer" is a concept nearly a half-century ahead of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

its time and almost entirely a nineteenth-century Teutonic idea. In *Amadeus*, all that remains of the historical Salieri are his posts as court composer and imperial Kapellmeister and his appetite for Viennese bonbons.

Though Salieri never achieved historical greatness, he was rightfully a highly respected and successful composer whose ability to provide operas for the court and to administer its musical establishment cannot be questioned. In contrast, Salieri's music performed in *Amadeus* is simpleminded and unworthy of his true abilities. There is no question that Mozart's improvisational and performance skills were exceptional; Salieri's remain unknown. However, by showing Salieri as a barely competent musician, the disparity of musical talent is deepened, thereby furthering Shaffer's dramatic plan. Salieri's music may never have achieved immortality, but it was always correct, skillful, and appropriate.

Salieri's employer, the Emperor Joseph II, also receives condescending treatment at odds with what we know of him. Shaffer and Forman portray the emperor as naive and as a poorly trained musician; his struggle through Salieri's easy little march drives this point home. If anything, Joseph II was a musical sophisticate and practitioner of a rather high order. The emperor attended to and participated in the management of his theaters and made time nearly every evening for chamber music in which he often took an active part either on the cello or at the keyboard. During his younger years, he was a student of Wenzel Raimund Birck (1718–63), and in 1762 he played the organ for a litany by Johann Adolf Hasse that was composed expressly to be performed by the imperial family. Joseph's reaction to Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* was "too many notes." Today, we regard this opinion as inappropriate, but it was widely shared during the eighteenth century by both connoisseurs and amateurs. Mozart's six string quartets dedicated to Haydn were regarded by many as unfathomable and unplayable, for there were "too many wrong notes." Some dissatisfied customers returned the parts to Mozart's publisher Artaria.

Shaffer's archbishop of Salzburg, Hieronymous Colloredo, is Joseph II's political and philosophical antipode; in *Amadeus* Joseph wanted to infuriate the archbishop. In fact, the election of Colloredo after the death of Sigismund Christoph Schrattenbach was a marked change toward Josephian ideals in Salzburg. Schrattenbach's reputation as benevolent and Colloredo's as imperious and difficult have stemmed mainly from the Mozart family correspondence. Judging the archbishop or anyone else on the basis of the Mozart family's opinions is to judge them from a heavily biased source, whose central interest was to have both secure employment and the freedom to travel. Colloredo demonstrated enlightenment views and actions during his term of office, and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Schrattenbach showed benevolence toward the Mozarts. He has been described by Volkmar Braunbehrens as a "crotchety, capricious bigot who professed great piety and would have been better as a children's priest than as bishop."

Mozart's mother had died in Paris in 1778, and his wife's father died in Vienna in 1779. Shaffer and Forman cleverly focus the personalities of the surviving parents with parallels from *Don Giovanni* and *Die Zauberflöte*: Leopold Mozart becomes the Commendatore, accompanied by that figure's dark harmonies, and Maria Cäcilie Weber becomes the Queen of the Night. Mozart described Frau Weber to his father as a very difficult person, so the analogy to the Queen of the Night becomes a highly suggestive characterization. Thus, *Amadeus* presents Constanze's mother, as far as we know, in generally accurate terms, even though in the film she remains on the periphery.

In contrast, Leopold Mozart completes—with Salieri, Wolfgang, and Constanze—the quartet of Shaffer's main characters. His relationship to the Commendatore is one based on the surface meaning of the title and bears little other resemblance to the character in *Don Giovanni,* who dies preserving his daughter's honor. Leopold is also protective, but in the sense of a meddler and harsh judge of his son. Shaffer's introduction of Leopold as an unexpected visitor to Vienna is not the actual setting in which he first met Constanze; the couple had, in fact, traveled to Salzburg in late 1783 for a family reunion that many have supposed to have not been the most pleasant of visits. In fact, *Amadeus* collocates the spirit of the 1783 stay in Salzburg with Leopold's 1785 visit to Vienna and with the circumstances of Mozart's economic problems of the later 1780s. Leopold's entry into the Viennese apartment, his observation of wine glasses and dishes from the previous night, his discovery of Constanze still in bed, and his accusatory questions—don't you have a maid, how is your financial situation, they say you have debts, do you have students, and, to Constanze, are you expecting—signal more today's folkways of upright living than those of a successful eighteenth-century free-lance musician in Vienna. If the questions are not quite right, the message they send to twentieth-century men and women about Leopold is clear enough. No doubt a letter Leopold sent to the Baroness von Waldstädten in Vienna was a central source for the *Amadeus* character:

> When I was a young fellow I used to think that philosophers were people who said little, seldom laughed and turned a sulky face upon the world in general. But my own experiences have completely persuaded me that without knowing it I must be a philosopher.

In contrast, when Leopold actually did visit his son from February 11 to April 25, 1785, Wolfgang was in the midst of high popularity and was



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

financially successful. During the period of Leopold's visit, Mozart gave six subscription concerts (February 11, 18, 25, March 4, 11, and 18); Joseph Haydn visited on February 12 for a reading of the first three of the six quartets that Wolfgang dedicated to him and told Leopold that his son was the greatest composer he knew in person or by reputation. On February 13, Mozart played his Piano Concerto K.456 at the Burgtheater; February 15 again another Concerto K.466 at the same house; February 21 performed for Count Zichy; March 10 gave another concert at the Burgtheater; March 13 and 15 the Musicians Society (Tonkünstler Societät) performed Mozart's oratorio *Davide Penitente* at the Burgtheater; March 20 Mozart was probably booked for Anna Storace's concert; April 2 performed all six of the "Haydn" Quartets at the residence of Baron Wetzlar von Plankenstern; and April 24 the Freemason Cantata K.471 was heard at the lodge "Zur Eintracht." All this was heady stuff for his father. Not even the tours the family made during the 1760s and 1770s could compare with such activity, and the money Mozart earned in this time was several times Leopold's yearly salary. His father's reaction was, for this old trooper, uncharacteristic:

> We never get to bed before one o'clock and I never get up before nine. We lunch at two or half past. The weather is horrible. Every day there are concerts; and the whole time is given up to teaching, music, composing and so forth. I feel rather out of it all. If only the concerts were over! It is impossible for me to describe the rush and bustle. Since my arrival your brother's fortepiano has been taken at least a dozen times to the theatre or to some other house. He has had a large fortepiano pedal made, which stands under the instrument and is about two feet longer and extremely heavy. It is taken to the Mehlgrube every Friday and has also been taken to Count Zichy's and to Prince Kaunitz's.

After Leopold departed from Vienna, he never saw his son again.

Mozart's relationship with his father was more ambivalent than *Amadeus* ever allows. Wolfgang's view of his parent was trifocal, with distinctly different and conflicting feelings. There was the father of his early years, who viewed his son as a "god-given miracle" and devoted himself to his education in music (violin, keyboard, and composition) and other branches of learning. Leopold not only fathered him, but also nurtured him in every other way. These early years must have fostered Wolfgang's fondest feelings. But the young Wolfgang was a pliable person, and Leopold was always in control as he directed tours to Paris, London, twice to Vienna, and three times to Italy.

During Wolfgang's early twenties, this relationship was affected in two ways: Leopold could no longer leave Salzburg for extended tours with his son, due to the archbishop's requirements for his residency, and Wolfgang was becoming less of the accommodating youth and more the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

headstrong adult. If Leopold could no longer share the glory, perhaps Wolfgang was no longer so glorious. Leopold hardly trusted his son, and while Wolfgang was in Paris and other locations, spies reported to him on his son's activities. The goal of this Parisian tour was to find an appointment for Wolfgang, which was never forthcoming. But the trip revealed Wolfgang's weakness for women and an inability to manage his money. The supreme blow was the death of his mother, from which the father-son relationship never recovered; Leopold blamed Wolfgang for her death.

After this taste of freedom from his parents and Salzburg, it became Wolfgang's overriding desire to make the break from the home turf. Being literally kicked out the door from the employ of the archbishop may have liberated Wolfgang, but at the same time it further isolated Leopold, who wanted Wolfgang to return to Salzburg, for he did not believe him capable of independence and self-management. Leopold viewed Wolfgang's not having a court appointment as a recipe for personal disaster, since he felt that the Viennese public would eventually tire of him and that Wolfgang was incapable of managing himself.

In addition, more than Leopold, the archbishop and the local musicians drove Mozart from Salzburg; the city also lacked a venue for a composer disposed toward opera. Lastly, there was the wunderkind factor, from which Wolfgang could certainly never escape as long as he remained in his birth city; everyone recognized him as "the little miracle" and not the young gifted man he was by the mid-1770s. Even though "next to God was Papa," after Wolfgang had established himself in Vienna and married Constanze, the struggle for total independence was essentially won.

Wolfgang was certainly not as clever as Leopold in controlling others for one's own purposes; but Leopold's management style left its residue and may have made it more difficult for Wolfgang to gain the sort of appointment Leopold desired for him. Already in 1769, Johann Adolph Hasse raised a flag:

> The said Sig. Mozard is a very polished and civil man, and the children are very well brought up. The boy is moreover handsome, vivacious, graceful and full of good manners; and knowing him, it is difficult to avoid loving him. I am sure that if his development keeps due pace with his years, he will be a prodigy, provided that his father does not perhaps pamper him too much or spoil him by means of excessive eulogies; that is the only thing I fear.

And again in 1771:

> Young Mozard is certainly marvelous for his age, and I do love him infinitely. The father, as far as I can see, is equally discontented everywhere, since here too



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he uttered the same lamentations. He idolizes his son a little too much, and thus does all he can to spoil him; but I have such a high opinion of the boy's natural good sense that I hope he will not be spoilt in spite of the father's adulation, but will grow into an honest fellow.

In December of the same year the Empress Maria Theresia advised her son Ferdinand, governor of Milan, and underlined further concerns:

You ask me to take the young Salzburger into your service. I do not know why, not believing that you have need of a composer or of useless people. If however it would give you pleasure, I have no wish to hinder you. What I say is intended only to prevent your burdening yourself with useless people and giving titles to people of that sort. If they are in service it degrades that service when these people go about the world like beggars.

The name Mozart may well have already acquired its own unenviable reputation when Wolfgang was searching for a new post in 1777–78.

To have cast Leopold's Janus-faced black carnival mask as both the Commendatore and the messenger who commissioned the Requiem is another example of Shaffer's theatrical brilliance; however, there is no basis for believing that at any time Mozart thought of this composition for his father's memory. It was ordered by Count Walsegg-Stuppach for his wife, and he pawned it off as his own composition, a common practice of his.

If Leopold was "next to God" in Wolfgang's world, his wife Constanze must have been somewhere in the same constellation; she was the mechanism by which he was able to display and enforce his independence, a point well made in *Amadeus*. At the same time, the portrait of her as an "air-head" willing to participate in Wolfgang's juvenile verbal games involving coprolalia, coprophilia, and sexual overtures in the Salzburg archbishop's Vienna residence prior to a musical academy and reception seems beyond imagination. Again the chronology is adjusted for Shaffer's and Forman's purposes; he could not have been cavorting with Constanze until after his break with the archbishop and certainly not under the eye of Salieri. If we can believe Mozart's own words, he presents a different sequence of events to his father:

One thing more I must tell you, which is that when I resigned the Archbishop's service, our love had not yet begun. It was born of her tender care and attentions when I was living in their house.

In the end, we know little about Constanze. The negative aspects of her character probably derive from Leopold and Mozart's sister, Nannerl. From her conduct as a widow, Constanze must have had consider-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

able musical and business acumen; she did much to further her deceased husband's as well as her own reputation. The accusation in prefeminist literature that she was neither worthy of her husband's genius nor understood it is patently unfair; this charge could have been leveled at any person Wolfgang might have married. Arthur Schurig, in the only book devoted to her, said she was "petty, narrow-minded, vain, greedy, superstitious, and gossipy." To anyone who has read the Mozart family correspondence, all of these adjectives could just as well be applied to her in-laws.

The most complete description of Constanze comes from a not unbiased source: Wolfgang himself, who before their marriage was trying to persuade Leopold of her attributes:

> But before I cease to plague you with my chatter, I must make you better acquainted with the character of Constanze. She is not ugly, but at the same time far from beautiful. Her whole beauty consists in two little black eyes and a pretty figure. She has no wit, but she has enough common sense to enable her to fulfil her duties as a wife and mother. It is a downright lie that she is inclined to be extravagant. On the contrary, she is accustomed to be shabbily dressed, for the little that her mother has been able to do for her children, she has done for the two others, but never for Constanze. True, she would like to be neatly and cleanly dressed, but not smartly, and most things that a woman needs she is able to make for herself; and she dresses her own hair every day. Moreover she understands housekeeping and has the kindest heart in the world. I love her and she loves me with all her heart. Tell me whether I could wish myself a better wife?

Finally, Shaffer and Forman imply that Constanze may have been unfaithful while she was in Baden for extended cures. It has been proposed elsewhere that she had an affair with Mozart's purported pupil and copyist, Franz Xaver Süssmayer, who was also in Baden during some of this time. As part of the argument some writers have pointed out that after Mozart's death her health seems to have returned and remained good. But it should be noted that she was never again pregnant. It has also been suggested that their son, born on July 26, 1791, named Franz Xaver Wolfgang, may have been Süssmayer's. This hypothesis is also untenable, for Franz Xaver Wolfgang carried his legitimate father's most distinctive genetic mark: a misshapen left ear.

In the end, the evidence does not support a negative view of Constanze. Criticism comes chiefly from those not well disposed to her and from a male-biased musicological community. Granted, Constanze's alteration of family letters has certainly irritated scholars and raised suspicions about her motivations, but that is applying twentieth-century views of biography to the more protective one of earlier times. Perhaps Constanze is best compared to another woman in Mozart's life, his



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mother, Anna Maria Walburga Pertl. We know little about her, but from what we do know, both in ability and proclivity, she might be the most viable parallel. Both women were able to act with propriety for the circumstances, yet maintain a great degree of anonymity.

*Amadeus*'s most controversial portrait is that of Wolfgang himself. How does one characterize an unexplainable phenomenon? While the problem for many lesser composers of Haydn's and Mozart's age is a lack of personal documentation, for Mozart and his family there is a plethora, including diaries, extended letters, notices and reviews in the press, and memoirs, as well as catalogues and autographs of the music itself. Yet, in a perceptive essay Alan Tyson asks: "What do we really know of Mozart or what can we know of Mozart?" Just how much does this bountiful documentation open to us the mind of a musical savant? Does the biography support the music, or is there no relationship between the man and the art? To the last question Shaffer would give a resounding "No." Shaffer's Wolfgang, in the words of his Salieri, was "a giggling dirty-minded creature." And as Shaffer's Salieri wonders about the "miraculous" nature and "sublimity" of the music, the dichotomy of the man and his music deepens. Thus, an implied but central question in *Amadeus* is: Does a relationship of Mozart's personality to his artistic products exist?

Such a question again comes out of the nineteenth century, not the eighteenth. In Mozart's time the prerequisites for a composer were neither genius nor the assertion of an individual artistic personality. Rather, it was a question of craftsmanship and the ability to provide new music appropriate to an occasion. A lexicon of musical ideas existed, designed and accepted for certain types of expression. A composer could select from this bank and create a musical product fully comprehensible to his audience. Mozart was able to manipulate this vocabulary both technically and affectively so as to create new depths of expression. It is within the essential style of the eighteenth century's last decades that Mozart operated. Thus, one should not be surprised that the man and the music may not have been congruent. Karoline Pichler, a Biedermeier woman of letters, observed:

> Mozart and Haydn, whom I knew well, were men in whose personal intercourse there was absolutely no other sign of unusual power of intellect and almost no trace of intellectual culture, nor of any scholarly or other higher interests. A rather ordinary turn of mind, silly jokes and in the case of the former, an irresponsible way of life, were all that distinguished them in society; and yet what depths, what worlds of fantasy, harmony, melody and feeling lay concealed behind this unpromising exterior.

The Salieri of *Amadeus*, when confronted with Mozart's autographs, remarked on seeing no corrections in the scores: "It is miraculous." Such



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an observation is also not quite correct. While Mozart, like any composer of his time, had the craft to produce works with unusual rapidity, there were a number of false starts and compositions left in progress over a period of one or two years. For some compositions sketches survive, and one must believe that these were more common than the number of extant examples indicates. Regarding the six quartets dedicated to Haydn, Mozart acknowledged in the letter that prefaced their publication: "They are, indeed, the fruit of a long and laborious study." When Shaffer's Wolfgang tells Schikaneder that *The Magic Flute* is all in his "noodle" and just needs to be written down, this is something less than a half-truth. Certainly, the concept and much of the composition may have already been formulated; the act of setting the notes on paper certainly engenders changes. For operas, once the rehearsals began, all sorts of revisions might occur to accommodate both the drama and the cast.

The ideas about eighteenth-century opera that Shaffer presents in *Amadeus* in some cases are accurate and in others are miscarriages of history. For example, the creation of an opera began with the selection of a subject. Then a poet was commissioned to prepare the text, and lastly a composer was hired with the expectation that he would tailor the arias to the already engaged singers. To present the court with an already completed opera was not correct protocol. Thus, in *Amadeus* the director of the Imperial Opera, Franz Xaver Orsini-Rosenberg, was only expecting the normal practice when he expressed wonderment at Mozart's presumptuousness in selecting a libretto, particularly of a drama—in this case *Figaro*—already forbidden to appear on the stage.

*Amadeus* also makes the point that *The Abduction from the Seraglio* is special because it is Turkish and takes place in a harem; such a setting was not unusual, and in fact Mozart had previously worked on a fragment known to us as *Zaide* with a similar location. When Mozart tries to make the case for *The Marriage of Figaro* as an opera, he is arguing for the genre of the opera buffa as opposed to opera seria, as if opera buffa were something totally unfamiliar to Joseph II and Vienna. This, too, is totally false. Opera buffa had played in the Viennese theaters with great success. When he compares the stiffness of a "Hercules" (that is, an opera-seria-type character) to the comic lightness of a "Hairdresser" (that is, Figaro himself), he finds the "Hairdresser" much more appealing. This had already been acknowledged by Viennese audiences through the success of Paisiello's *Barber of Seville,* to which *The Marriage of Figaro* was a sequel. Opera seria is portrayed as a dead genre in the 1780s; according to words placed in Mozart's mouth, it "shits marble."

Such an idea about opera seria was fostered by German musicologists



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

needlessly trying to elevate further Mozart's position on the historical horizon as the first German master of a new genre, opera buffa. Mozart's last opera, *The Clemency of Titus*, also was an opera seria; it continued to breathe well into the nineteenth century, as testified by the popularity not only of *Titus* but of later representatives of the genre by such Italian composers as Mayr, Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, and Verdi. In *Amadeus*, Mozart's speech to the emperor on the great finales in *Figaro*, pointing to their length, absence of recitative, and the accumulation of characters from a duet to the entire cast, is purported to be a new idea. In fact, it comes from his librettist Lorenzo da Ponte. However, da Ponte wrote this as a description of what the audience demanded, and, regardless of its dramatic viability, it had to be. Even the reception of *Figaro* is altered for dramatic purposes; *Amadeus* views it as a failure. In truth, the emperor had to forbid encores so that performances of an already lengthy opera would not continue without end.

Lastly, one must take issue with the way the operatic performances themselves were led. In *Amadeus* both Salieri and Mozart conducted their operas in the manner to which today's audiences are accustomed. Such was not the case in the eighteenth century; conductorial responsibilities were divided between the concertmaster, who was responsible for the orchestra, and the keyboardist, who was in charge of the vocal forces and played a supporting role for the orchestral music. For the first several performances of an opera, the composer directed from the harpsichord or fortepiano with a few leading gestures aimed at the singers.

A primary issue in both stage and screen versions is Mozart's behavior: his cavorting with Constanze in a public room of a noble residence, his use of inappropriate language, his excessive drinking, his lack of respect for the emperor and archbishop, his public parody of Salieri, his high self-opinion, and his general insensitivity to propriety. That which took place in view of the Salzburg archbishop and the emperor would have resulted in banishment from court or worse. Even though protocol had been loosened during the reign of the "people's" emperor, it is almost unimaginable that anyone would tell Joseph II that something he said was "absurd." Again, the result would have meant that none of the Viennese operas would have been commissioned or composed and that no venue for them would have existed. Certainly, Mozart must have treated the emperor and his entourage with some special care.

Mozart's drinking runs as a sub-theme throughout the plot in *Amadeus*. But in reality, it seems that he rarely drank to excess, though in his last year or two his drinking did appear to have increased. During the summer of 1791 when Constanze was in Baden, "he used to drink



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

champagne with Schikaneder all morning, and punch all night." But this report stems from Ignaz Ernst Ferdinand Karl Arnold, who was without firsthand knowledge. While alcoholic writers are legion, the condition seems rare among composers; it is possible that great music was composed under the influence, but not with such consistency or productivity.

*Amadeus* also brings up the issue of Mozart's extramarital conduct. The scene is after the first performance of *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. Constanze Weber is introduced to the emperor as Mozart's fiancée. Thereupon Cavalierri, the prima donna and in fact Salieri's mistress, slugs Mozart. Salieri replies under his breath, "Mozart's had her." About Mozart's sexual encounters, apart from Constanze, one can only speculate. Some biographers have it that Mozart was in love with almost all of his keyboard students, his prima donnas, and his cousin Basle, to whom he wrote a series of scatological letters. Whether Mozart was infatuated, in love, or had sexual liaisons with all or none of these women cannot be proven one way or the other. If he did, Mozart's catalogue might have rivaled that of Don Giovanni's. But one must note two letters that suggest prudence and restraint. The first one concerns the Bohemian composer Joseph Mysliweček's syphilis; his nose had become ulcerated and was nearly gone. Mozart experienced his appearance at firsthand and was well aware of the cause of this disfigurement, for he wrote to his father:

> There are people who think that no one can love a poor girl without having evil designs; and that charming word maîtresse, wh——e in our tongue, is really much too charming! But I am no Brunetti! no Mysliwechek! I am a Mozart, and a young and clean-minded Mozart.

In December 1781 he again wrote:

> You must, therefore, allow me to disclose to you my reasons, which, moreover, are very well founded. The voice of nature speaks as loud in me as in others, louder, perhaps, than in many a big strong lout of a fellow. I simply cannot live as most young men do in these days. In the first place, I have too much religion; in the second place, I have too great a love of my neighbour and too high a feeling of honour to seduce an innocent girl; and, in the third place, I have too much horror and disgust, too much dread and fear of diseases and too much care for my health to fool about with whores.

It is certainly possible that Mozart was again posturing for his father, as he did with some frequency during and after his tour to Paris and back in 1777–78. Still, the Mysliweček encounter must have made a lasting



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

impression about the dangers of loose living, especially for one so conscious of his own appearance.

Some postmortems lead us to believe that Mozart's early death was precipitated, if not caused, by the way he lived during his last years, a conclusion that could also be drawn from the last portions of *Amadeus*. Others favored the poisoning theory. Attempts to diagnose Mozart's last illness from both medical and lay observation have put forth a variety of non-poisonous causes ranging from typhus to rheumatic fever. The most thorough investigation, by Dr. Peter J. Davies, concludes that Mozart died of Schönlein-Henoch syndrome caused by a streptococcal infection contracted at a Masonic lodge meeting on November 18. Attempted diagnoses after two hundred years remain unconvincing. Nevertheless, the specific cause of death would not have had so much ink spilled over it if it were not for the rumors of poisoning.

More fascinating than Mozart's terminal illness is Davies' conclusion about what drove the composer during his adult years. Why and how did he produce so much during some periods and so little during others? Dr. Davies believes that Mozart suffered from a cyclothymic disorder with upswings and downturns in mood, but without psychotic tendencies. He points out that "artists are capable of astonishing bursts of creative activity . . . and Mozart is the ultimate example." Beginning with the late 1770s, Davies detects five such bursts: (1) Mannheim, 1777–78; (2) Munich, 1780–81; (3) Vienna, first half of 1786; (4) Vienna, summer 1788; and (5) Vienna, first quarter of 1791. For example, during Davies' third burst, Mozart finished *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Impresario*, the two piano concertos K.488 and 491, the piano quartet K.493, the horn concerto K.495, and some smaller works. On the other hand, periods of overt productivity (that is, the completion of a work) should not be allowed to obscure times of covert preparation. With the excitement of a premiere like *Figaro*, Mozart's behavior, according to Davies, might go somewhat off the rails. Davies also finds a narcissistic dependency, requiring "a regular supply of love from an esteemed love object." With this combination of psychological factors and the general problems of security encountered by a free-lance musician, it is no wonder that Mozart may have had at times some difficulty coping.

*Amadeus* portrays Mozart in the nineteenth-century fashion as an unappreciated and misunderstood genius whose financial situation was either borderline or impoverished, with only a few coins left. Yet, according to Shaffer's and Forman's film version, he lived throughout the period after 1781 in a luxurious apartment in central Vienna. In fact, Mozart changed residence frequently, and his income, according to recent studies, was unusually high for a musician, placing him during some years in the top 10 percent of all Vienna's inhabitants. Either way,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mozart was never poor by the standards of his time. The idea of an impoverished composer comes from a series of letters he wrote to his Masonic brother Michael Puchberg from 1788 to 1791 asking for loans. For example, on July 12, 1789, he writes:

DEAREST, MOST BELOVED FRIEND AND MOST HONOURABLE B.O.

Great God! I would not wish my worst enemy to be in my present position. And if you, most beloved friend and brother, forsake me, we are altogether lost, *both my unfortunate and blameless self* and my poor sick wife and child. Only the other day when I was with you I was longing to open my heart to you, but I had not the courage to do so—and indeed I should still not have the courage—for, as it is, I only dare to write and I tremble as I do so—and I should not even dare to write, were I not certain that you know me, that you are aware of my circumstances, and that you are wholly convinced of my *innocence* as my unfortunate and most distressing situation is concerned. Good God! I am coming to you not with thanks but with fresh entreaties! Instead of paying my debts I am asking for more money!

From these letters and the lack of other data, it has been concluded that Mozart was rejected by the Viennese.

Rather than a single reason, a number of factors contributed to his worsening financial situation. Mozart's income came from five sources: public and private appearances as a pianist, the giving of subscription concerts, teaching, commissions, and the publication of his music. Such endeavors were heavily affected, as they are today, by economic conditions and related factors. In the late 1780s Austria was occupied with the Turkish war, and many of Mozart's patrons were serving in the military or were not at their Viennese residences; even the emperor was in the field during 1788. Constanze had been ill, requiring her to go to Baden for a cure; at one point her condition with an ulcerated ankle was potentially serious. Cures at the spring baths, used only by the wealthy, must have been expensive. During the late 1780s Mozart appears to have been trying to streamline his income-producing activities from several sources to composition alone. Despite the general as well as their particular economic situation, the Mozarts continued to live in their accustomed style, resulting in temporary problems of cash flow. The situation was exacerbated by their failure to save any money during his high-flying first six or seven years of the 1780s and by a judgment against Mozart in 1791 resulting from a suit brought by Prince Karl Lichnowsky that required a substantial payment. Nevertheless, had Mozart lived, he would probably have equaled or exceeded Haydn's considerable earnings during the 1790s.

During the early 1780s, the disparity of high-income estimates with expenses led the Mozart scholar Uwe Krämer to ask what happened to



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mozart's money. Krämer concluded that much of this cash was gambled away at billiards and cards. This theory has met with mixed reactions ranging from rejection to the acceptance of it as at least a possibility. Though it can neither be proven nor disproven, some statements about Mozart's style of living could be read as disguised references to gambling. Peter J. Davies believes that Mozart's personality traits, combined with his environment, could have made him prone to such compulsive behavior.

The *Amadeus* version of Mozart's last days and interment are a combination of imagination and discredited tradition. Imagination dominates the Shaffer and Forman film version of Mozart's last days, where Salieri's attendance at a performance of *The Magic Flute* on October 13, 1791, is placed in time close to Mozart's death on December 5. Shaffer's version has Salieri assisting Mozart with the Requiem during a brief final illness. In actuality, Mozart's widow pursued at least three composers to complete Mozart's last work before settling on Franz Xaver Süssmayer as the collaborator, and the final illness lasted for three weeks, not a matter of hours. It was Constanze and her family who lovingly cared for him, an irony that would never have been appreciated by his father and sister. Mozart's funeral and burial were arranged by the Baron Gottfried van Swieten, who adhered to the Josephian burial guidelines and was cognizant of the deceased's financial situation. *Amadeus* presents a probably accurate picture of the burial. To today's eyes, the dumping of a bagged body into a communal grave must seem the ultimate insult, but it must be stressed that in 1791 this was the burial experienced by about 85 percent of Vienna's population. It was the norm, not an interment reserved only for the impoverished.

*Amadeus* is but one of several recent attempts to exploit the continued fascination with Mozart during the last two hundred and thirty years. Two recent widely read books also freely interpret Mozart's biography and psyche: Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *Mozart* and Francis Carr's *Mozart and Constanze*. Hildesheimer provides many insights with his close readings of the letters, but his speculations about Mozart's love life and his emotional detachment from the world around him have little support. He views the man's expression as artificial and insensitive, erroneously measuring Mozart against today's expected modes of reaction to given situations. Unfamiliar with recent research, he supports some of the old fictions and adds some of his own. Like *Amadeus*, his Mozart is a fascinating character, and the work contains penetrating insights together with many wrongheaded interpretations.

Another dilettante biographer, Francis Carr, also gives the impression of a search for historical truth by using documents and by thanking the learned men of the Mozarteum in Salzburg for their assistance. Carr



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

revives the poisoning hypothesis, accusing not Salieri, but Franz Hofdemel because of an affair (manufactured by Carr) that Mozart had with Hofdemel's wife Magdalena, one of his piano students. Hofdemel, days after Mozart's death, disfigured his wife and then committed suicide. While the sorry fate of the Hofdemels is true, the only additional connection to be made with Mozart is that he was a Masonic brother and creditor of the composer. Otherwise, only the coincidence of time and place can be made between Mozart's death and Hofdemel's suicide. Carr's book is nothing but tabloid biography masquerading under documentation.

*Amadeus* the play and movie, as well as the books by Hildesheimer and Carr, derived their success from the unquestionable fascination Mozart holds for us today. Without the name of Mozart, the deep interest in these artifacts of our own culture would not exist. For those who want letters, memoirs, and other primary sources in order to make their own interpretation, these are readily available, but they cannot be taken as "just the facts," for nearly every writer of letters and memoirs, as well as the purveyors of rumors, had his own agendas and beliefs. It is from the documents themselves and their interpretation that the Mozartean mythologies flourished.

Why does Mozart command so much attention? Perhaps it stems from the eternally misguided effort to understand the man behind the music. Although Mozart's music is often recognized as universal, it has received varying interpretations of its essential meaning. For example, critical opinion of the Symphony No. 40 in G Minor K.550 is one of total admiration, but its character has remained elusive. Robert Schumann found it classical in the strict sense, full of Grecian "lightness and grace." Alfred Einstein thought it a "fatalistic piece of chamber music." Jens Peter Larsen believed it was not the expression of a private mood. Robbins Landon stated that it belongs to a series of works revealing the downside of Mozart's manic tendencies, while Jack Westrup found in it the spirit of opera buffa. Probably no work of the symphonic canon elicits such a wide range of affective reactions from knowledgeable critics. But perhaps it is this variety of reactions to his music that explains the varied interpretations of the person. Perhaps it is only in this sense that the biographies with their explanations of the man parallel the receptions of the music. While one can attempt to set the historical record straight, Shaffer's and Forman's Salieri had it right on one count: the phenomenon of Mozart transcends explanation.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# The Demons and Dr. Dawkins

DAVID STOVE

SUPPOSE THAT ISAAC NEWTON HAD BEEN EXTREMELY RICH and had created at his own expense scholarships that fully supported, at one time or another, a dozen promising but poor young mathematicians or scientists. Or suppose that J. S. Bach had died very rich and had provided in his will for a valuable scholarship to be awarded each year to the five most talented young composers around. Would these have been *selfish* actions on the part of Newton or Bach?

Obviously not. Quite the reverse: these actions would have been thought, and rightly thought, to be unusually generous ones. They would have been praised, and rightly, as evidence of a disinterested love of knowledge in Newton, and of Bach's devotion to the art of music. There might be evidence that Newton and Bach were selfish men, but these actions could not possibly form part of that evidence, since they are plainly evidence to the contrary. Human nature being what it is, there might indeed have been some tincture of *vanity* in doing such generous things on so conspicuous a scale. But that is altogether different from their being selfish actions.

Nowadays, however, there are certain biologists who would say that these actions *were* selfish ones, by virtue of their self-replicatory tendency. That is, that Newton and Bach, by creating their respective scholarships, had adopted the best means available to them, with the possible exception of parenthood, of increasing the number of people like themselves. What should we think of a biologist who said such a thing?

I would argue that we should think badly of him, from both a moral and an intellectual point of view. First, he would be making moral mischief. For, by calling Newton's creation of the scholarships "selfish," he must tend to make people think the worse of Newton, on account of certain actions that were in reality much to his credit. Second, he would be making intellectual mischief. Nothing whatever can literally replicate

✪ DAVID STOVE is the author of *Popper and After* and *The Plato Cult.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

itself. The most that anything could possibly do in that way is to produce perfect copies of itself. By contrast, the object or target of selfishness is, by the very meaning of that word, oneself and nothing else. A superscientist may create an exact copy of me in his laboratory, or I may happen to have an identical twin brother. Still, it is not this copy or twin who is the object of my selfishness; it is myself.

In reality, of course, the tendency of Newton scholarships to create Newton copies would be extremely weak. But it makes no difference, however strong we think of it as being. Suppose that, in some mysterious way, a Newton scholarship always transformed its recipient into a nearly exact replica, mental and physical, of Isaac Newton at the age of twenty-one. Would this mean, or would it be even the slightest evidence, that Newton had behaved selfishly in creating his scholarships? Again, obviously not. A man, by having ten sons who are all extremely like him, does not furnish even the faintest evidence that he is selfish. If anything, he furnishes some slight evidence to the contrary.

What should we think of a virologist who insisted on calling viruses "selfish" just because of their strong natural tendency to self-replication? Well, this man (unlike a man who called Newton scholarships "selfish") would not be making moral mischief. But he would be making intellectual mischief. Viruses not only are not selfish; they could not be. It makes no sense to say of a virus that it is selfish, any more than it makes sense to say of an electron that it is suspicious, of a triangle that it is supercilious, or of a number that it is sex-mad.

Genes, like viruses, have a strong tendency to self-replication. But, of course, to call genes "selfish" on that account, or on any account, would be just as nonsensical as calling viruses "selfish." Genes can no more be selfish than they can be, say, studious or slatternly. Yet, although in real life no virologist ever has called viruses "selfish" (as far as I know), there really is a writer on genetics who insists on calling genes "selfish."

This writer is Dr. Richard Dawkins of Oxford University, and to say that he has insisted on talking in this way is putting it mildly at that. He published a book that purports to explain organic evolution in general as principally the effect of what he calls the "ruthless selfishness" of genes. And, as if to exclude all possibility of misunderstanding, he entitled the book *The Selfish Gene*.

Since it is not only nonsense, but very obviously nonsense, to describe genes as selfish, it might reasonably have been anticipated that the publication of this book would injure Dr. Dawkins's reputation. In fact, the result was absolutely the opposite. The book not only sold enormously, but at once raised its author to the very front rank of biological authorities. Now, there is something in this more than a little puzzling. How far, do you think, would you or I get with publishers, to



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

say nothing of readers, if we tried to publish a book, the central thesis of which was transparently nonsensical, a book entitled, say, *The Sex-Mad Prime Numbers*? Nowhere, clearly. How, then, is this prodigy in publishing history to be explained?

## II

Easily. Genes are to Dawkins what witches were to many Christian demonologists in the sixteenth century, or what "Zurich gnomes" used to be to many socialist demonologists of the twentieth century. They are beings, that is, that are hidden, immoral, and possessed of such immense power over us that we are merely their helpless puppets, except insofar as God, or History, or some equally extraordinary agency comes to our assistance.

We usually think of ourselves, our dogs, our garden plants as being causal agents, as well as causal patients—that is, that while, of course, they are subjected to countless causal influences, they exercise plenty of causal influence themselves. Humans, in particular, we think of as being quite powerful causal agents. At any rate, we know that in our causal interaction with our dogs, for example, we are very much the senior partners.

But all this is a mistake, according to Dawkins. For you, your dog, and your favorite tree are mere organisms, and organisms, he says, are just some throwaway envelopes of a fleshy or fibrous composition, which it suits certain genes to make brief use of as they go about their own endless work of maximizing the number of their copies.

Now, the branches of literature differ widely, and the different branches tend to have non-overlapping classes of readers: the devotees of poetry are not, as a rule, those of philosophy, and the devotees of history form a separate class again. But there is one branch of literature that, at one level or another, unites in its favor the votes of all readers. This consists of disclosures of the appalling immorality that is rife among those who are placed furthest above us in power and whose activities are, as a general rule, the most completely hidden from our view. "The Secret History of the Court of King So-and-So" has been a natural best-seller ever since the time of Procopius, fifteen hundred years ago, and no doubt much longer ago still.

Well now, genes are, for a fact, exceedingly well hidden: so well hidden, indeed, that not a single human being ever knew of their existence before the present century. Then, as we have recently discovered, they are and always have been enormously powerful causal agents at work in human life, as in animal and plant life. Finally, the immorality



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of genes is extreme, if what Dawkins reports of them is true. For he says that they are ruthlessly selfish; and he also believes, as most of us do, that ruthless selfishness is immoral and something very much to be discouraged in our children.

This is the explanation of the runaway success of *The Selfish Gene.* The book did not contain, and made no pretense of containing, any addition to existing knowledge or theory in evolutionary biology. It was avowedly a book that expounded, combined, and semi-popularized the work of various other biologists. It gave non-biologist readers an overview—and a very readable one—of the mainstream of evolutionary biology since R. A. Fisher, in his epoch-making book *The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection* (1930), first "married" genetics to the theory of evolution. But Dawkins had the wit to perceive, as no one before him had, that recent evolutionary biology could be given the piquant flavor of "The Secret History of the Court of King Gene," or of what the newspapers would nowadays call "The Power Behind the P.M.," "Palace Parties—Shocking Revelations," and so forth.

Dawkins often assures his readers that, when he calls genes "selfish," he is not nonsensically attributing to them a certain psychological or subjective makeup: that he does not mean that genes are "conscious, purposeful agents." The language of selfishness, applied to genes, is "only a figure of speech," he says. But it gives him a vivid way of conveying to readers what he believes to be literally true: that organisms are simply certain vehicles programmed, built, and manipulated by their genes, as a part of the everlasting grind of multiplying copies of themselves. Anyway, he says, his talk about genes as "selfish" cannot be importantly wrong, because it is *dispensable*: he (or we) could always "translate [it] back into respectable terms if we wanted to."

The sense in which Dawkins uses the word *selfish*, he says, is one that is standard among biologists and is "*behavioral*, not subjective." What this sense is, he explains thus: "An entity, such as a baboon, is said to be altruistic if it behaves in such a way as to increase another such entity's welfare at the expense of its own. Selfish behaviour has exactly the opposite effect. 'Welfare' is defined as 'chances of survival.' "

It is true that biologists often define selfish behavior as behavior that increases the survival chances of an organism at the expense of the chances of its conspecifics. It is also true that, in the mainstream of evolutionary biology, to which Dawkins belongs and of which this book is a defense, biologists have often maintained that all the behavior of organisms, or virtually all of it, is selfish in this behavioral sense. These writers have therefore made a "problem" out of altruistic behavior and, most saliently, out of parental care. Still, there had been nothing in any



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of this to justify Dawkins in calling *genes* selfish in the behavioral sense; at most it would show that *organisms* are so.

Dawkins, however, insists that genes are selfish, and says that he uses that word in the behavioral sense. Yet where is the connection, or, rather, what possible connection is there, between selfishness in the behavioral sense and that feature of genes upon which everything in Dawkins's book turns: their *self-replicatory* propensity? To justify his calling genes selfish in the behavioral sense, he would need to show that self-replication increases the self-replicator's chances of survival. But how could he, or anyone, possibly make that out?

Do I, by manufacturing a replica of myself, improve my *own* chances of survival? It is obvious that I do nothing of the kind. The replica might conceivably afford me some slight gratification, if I should happen to be so uncommonly vain as to like having around the place a flesh-and-blood, three-dimensional copy of myself. But I would not, by making him, have removed one year or one second from my age, or lightened, by however little, the burden of my present or future disorders and afflictions. The same is true of genes.

At this point, however, Dawkins would remind me that "the selfish gene . . . is not just one physical bit of DNA . . . it is *all replicas* of a particular bit of DNA, distributed throughout the world." What a gene does by self-replicating, he says, is to benefit "itself in the form of *copies* of itself." "The gene is a long-lived replicator, existing in the form of many duplicate copies" of itself.

That is how Dawkins made out the case on which his whole book depends. All he had to do was to talk about things that "exist in the form of" other things and, more specifically, about things "existing in the form of" copies of themselves.

This may seem unimportant at first, but further reflection will convince you that there is a great future for this business of existing in the form of other things and, in fact, that its potential usefulness is unlimited. For example, Dr. Dawkins should certainly say to his identical twin (if he has one), "You ought to give me all your money, because by doing so you would benefit yourself, in the form of me." If Dawkins is right, his twin can have no rational objection to enriching himself in this original way. Then, think how "existing in the form of copies" will take the worry out of the doctrine of the Trinity, which perplexes so many Christians. There is God Himself, but He also exists in the form of two copies of Himself. What could be more simple than that, or more satisfactory? Again, since many people would pay good money to have Elvis Presley in the house, there is a fortune to be made by the first manufacturer to mass-produce Presley in the form of Presley dolls of some acceptable degree of fidelity to the original. Or, to be strictly



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

accurate, there is a fortune to be made in Presley dolls *if* it is true that something can exist in the form of copies of itself, and that a gene's self-replication is selfish in the sense of increasing its *own* chances of survival.

If you cannot get, without fudging, from self-replication to selfishness even in the behavioral sense, then you certainly cannot get from self-replication to selfishness in the ordinary sense. Yet it is not really open to doubt that it was the *ordinary* sense of the word that, though constantly disavowed, "carried" Dawkins's book with its readers. Suppose that, before publishing it, Dawkins actually *had* done what he says it was always open to him or anyone to do: "translate" every reference to selfishness in the book, "back into respectable terms," about self-replication. What would have been the result? The title would have become *The Self-Replicating Gene,* which is about as interesting as watching paint dry or as entitling a book on cats *The Fish-Eating Cat.*

## III

I do not believe that humans are the helpless puppets of their genes, and I cannot even take that proposition seriously. Why? Because I have heard far too many stories like that one before and because it is obvious what is wrong with all of them.

"Our *stars* rule us," says the astrologer. "Man is *what he eats,*" said Feuerbach. "We are what our infantile sexual experiences made us," says the Freudian. "The individual counts for nothing, his class-situation for everything," says the Marxist. "We are what our socio-economic circumstances make us," says the social worker. "We are what Almighty God created us," says the Christian theologian. There is simply no end of this kind of stuff.

What is wrong with all such theories is this: that they deny, at least by implication, that human intentions, decisions, and efforts are among the causal agencies that make a difference in the world. This denial is, of course, so utterly absurd that no rational person would pause over it, let alone gravely discuss it. No one ever doubts, at least while he has or remembers having a big fish on his line, that the efforts of even a fish can make a difference to the outcome of a situation; especially if the fish gets away after all. And, if even fish efforts can have causal efficacy, human efforts can hardly be without it.

The falsity of all these theories of human helplessness is so extremely obvious that the puppetry-theorist himself cannot avoid admitting it, and thus is never able to adhere consistently to his puppetry theory. Feuerbach, though he said that man is what he eats, was obliged to admit that, after all, meals do not eat meals. The Christian theologian, after saying



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that his Creator is omnipotent and he himself nothing, will often go on to reproach himself with *disobeying* this Creator. The Freudian therapist believes in the overpowering influence of infantile sexual experiences; still, he makes an excellent living by encouraging his patients to believe that, with his help, this overpowering influence can be overpowered. And so on it goes: this kind of inconsistency is—to put it mildly—extremely familiar.

In the same tiresome way, Dawkins contradicts his puppetry theory. He says, "We are . . . robot-vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes," that we are "manipulated to ensure the survival of [our] genes," and so on. But, of course, he knows as well as the rest of us that there are, in us and around us, other causes at work that are quite capable of counteracting genetic influences. In fact, he says so, and he even says that "we have the power to *defy* the selfish genes of our birth. . . ." He is just like the Christian theologians or like the writers of boys' serials who used to say, in order to extricate their hero from an impossible situation, "With one bound, Jack was free!"

Although we human beings are fully paid-up causal agents, we enter into many very *unequal* causal partnerships. Sometimes we are the senior partner in these, sometimes the junior. A man is certainly the senior partner of his puppet—I mean a real wood-and-string puppet. But we are also often junior causal partners, indeed very junior ones, even to other human beings. In business, or politics, or personal affairs, another man may even be able to prevail upon me to act simply as his "pawn" or "puppet."

But even the most junior of causal partners always has some powers of its own and some powers, at that, that it exercises upon the senior partner. A wooden puppet is one of our most junior causal partners, but even it cannot be got to do what you want it to, unless you first ascertain its *present* state—which is to say, unless its present state affects your senses. Even then, manipulating a puppet depends upon its retaining its own causal bent, including its propensity to gravitate. If you were in the middle of a long space journey and in a state of weightlessness, you could not pass the weary hours by putting on a puppet show.

For all the above familiar reasons, sensible people take no notice when yet another crank writes a book and tells us that we are the helpless puppets of something or other, and it turns out that this time it is genes. Yet fairness to Dawkins requires me to add that *genetic* puppetry theory, though a member of a slum breed, is not just any old average member. On the contrary, it is easily the most excusable of all puppetry theories.

The science of genetics is not yet even a hundred years old, but it has already revealed the existence of a previously unknown class of causal



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

agents that are so powerful that the discovery of them has left us in a state of shock and fear, mixed with intellectual intoxication. The causation of many human attributes, we now know, is entirely or principally genetic, and therefore cannot be significantly interfered with by such external agencies as education or welfare money. Now, is it any wonder, in these circumstances, if some people have made a demonology out of genetics?

## IV

It is no mystery why the supply of puppetry theories never fails: there is an unfailing demand for them. People want relief from responsibility, and puppetry theories promise them this relief. There is also (as Mary Midgley pointed out in her article "Gene-juggling," published in *Philosophy)* a sado-masochistic element in all such theories. People take a certain satisfaction in contemplating their own supposed helplessness and the irresistible power of their masters.

For this reason puppetry theories, in the hands of the few individuals who invent them, always display a strong tendency to expand. The person who has dreamed up a set of demons or puppet masters behind one field of phenomena is quite the likeliest man to dream up, later on, another set of demons behind another field of phenomena, or to come up with a single but far wider set of demons, comprehending the set that he had happened to stumble upon first. The people who suffer from delusions of being conspired against are always being obliged to conclude that this conspiracy is more widespread than they had previously realized. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, witch-hunters were constantly and genuinely astonished because where they had expected to find one witch, they always found twenty.

It is therefore not surprising, though it is rather alarming, when Dawkins announces, in the last chapter of *The Selfish Gene,* the existence of a second set of hidden beings who manipulate us while selfishly replicating themselves. This is the only original part of his book. It is also the worst part of the book, by a margin that it would be difficult to exaggerate. But so extremely favorable has been the book's overall reception that even this part of it has met with respectful attention from many grave professors. Their most frequent reaction to it, all too predictably, has been of the "It's an outrageous proposal but we'll certainly consider it" kind. But, as recently as 1989, at least one very distinguished American philosopher, Daniel C. Dennet, has given this part of the book his enthusiastic assent.

When genes were first discovered, they had, of course, no established name. The discoverers' phraseology varied, and an entirely new word



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was obviously needed. A Danish friend of William Bateson suggested "genes," Bateson himself coined "genetics," and these names stuck. Just so, Dawkins needed a new name for the new things that he had discovered in 1976. He decided to call them "memes."

A meme is anything that can be transmitted by non-genetic means from one human being to another. Hence all ideas, beliefs, attitudes, styles, customs, fashions—in fact, all the elements of culture in the broadest sense—are memes. There is a meme for Pythagoras's theorem and another for wearing stiletto heels, a meme for being in favor of capital punishment and another one for the idea of a triangle, a meme for the Mozart Requiem and another for shaving, and so forth.

Now, Dawkins says, organic evolution is driven by the struggle between one gene and its rival genes for a place on the chromosome and with that the chance to self-replicate. Just so, *cultural* evolution, he says, is driven by the struggle between one meme and its rival memes for a place in our brains. Take, for example, the meme for the belief that the sun is at the center of the local planetary system. A few brains in classical antiquity had contained this meme, but it then disappeared for nearly two thousand years. In the mid-sixteenth century, however, it popped up again in the brain of Copernicus, and a struggle began between this heliocentrism meme and the geocentrism meme. At that time, the latter was settled in almost all brains, but the heliocentrism meme has won this struggle long ago. It has been so successful in replicating itself from one brain to another that by now there are hardly any brains left that harbor the geocentrism meme.

Even a single kind of meme, such as a belief meme, can be transmitted from brain to brain in many different ways. Beliefs can be transmitted, for example, by teaching people some science or mathematics—heliocentrism or Pythagoras's theorem, say; by telling people lies; or by brainwashing them. Now, we usually think of these as being three importantly different activities; and we think of them as all being, in any case, activities of human agents. But, according to Dawkins, all this is a mistake. Teaching science, lying, and brainwashing are simply three different ways in which memes in certain brains succeed in replicating themselves in other brains. In all three, the causal agents at work are not human beings: it is the memes themselves that do these various things.

Well, that is what Dawkins discovered in 1976, if "discovered" is the right word. *Are* memes a scientific discovery? Well, one thing is absolutely certain: if they are, they are the most effortless scientific discovery of all time, past or future. For what did it take, after all? What was the evidence and the reasoning that enabled Dawkins to discover memes in 1976, although their very existence, like that of genes before 1900, had been unsuspected before?



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To tell the truth, it was nothing more than the following: Sometimes such things as beliefs, attitudes, and so forth are transmitted non-genetically from one person to another. So: There are memes.

Who can fail to be reminded by this of Huxley's remark after he first read *The Origin of Species*: "How extremely stupid not to have thought of that!" Why, even *I* had known for years before 1976 that people often "pick up" opinions, attitudes, and so forth from other people to whom they are not related. There was, of course, some slight excuse for myself and all the other losers: Dawkins's discovery of memes is utterly unlike anything that the history of science has made us familiar with. What scientific discovery ever looked like that? Yet there is something very familiar about Dawkins's discovery, at any rate to a philosopher, something horribly familiar, in fact. I have seen that same kind of thing hundreds of times before, but where? Why, in those absolutely effortless pseudo-discoveries that *philosophers* make and on which their fame rests. Plato's "discovery" of universals, for example.

Plato's "discovery" went as follows: It is possible for something to be a certain way and for something else to be the same way. So: There are universals. (Tumultuous applause, which lasts, despite occasional subsidences, about 2,400 years.)

This kind of maximum effortlessness is typical of philosophical "discoveries," and it is not hard to say *which* kind it is: the elements of it are obvious enough. The premises must be of minimum number (ideally one), and each premise must be of maximum triviality. The line of the reasoning must be of minimum length, and single: no converging lines of reasoning, for example. Finally, the reasoning must be strictly deductive, or of zero risk. This last desideratum is mostly easily achieved, and often is achieved, by simply making the conclusion just a more arresting way of saying what the premise had said to begin with.

But the pseudo-discovery of "memes" invites a more specific comparison with the real scientific discovery of genes. Dawkins, to make his "discovery," did not need to draw upon any specialized knowledge, or to exercise either his experimental or his inferential powers. All he needed was to remember that some things are transmitted non-genetically from one person to another, to give these things a new name, and then to allow free rein to the demonological bias of his mind. It was absolutely effortless.

The discovery of genes, by contrast, was remarkably long and drawn out in time. It extended from Gregor Mendel's work in the 1860s on crossing various strains of peas, through the rediscovery of that work in 1900, to at least the early breeding experiments of T. H. Morgan during the First World War. Now, was any of this effortless? On the contrary, Morgan and his associates had first to acquire a good deal of biological



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

information, and then to work rather hard and long with their heads and hands, to design, perform, and interpret their experiments. In 1900, Bateson perceived, though few other people did, what Mendel's experiments on peas really meant; and I suppose that this difference between Bateson and most other people must have had *something* to do with his vast fund of biological information and with prolonged and severe exercise of his penetrating intelligence.

But in all of this, easily the greatest feat of intellectual penetration was performed by Mendel himself. The phenomena of inheritance are so bewilderingly various that no one before Mendel, not even the most expert breeders of plants and animals, had ever been able to see the forest for the trees. Yet in order to be understood, these phenomena only needed to be looked at in the light of two ideas—that the "factors" of inheritance do not blend in the offspring and that they sort themselves independently of one another—ideas that, as R. A. Fisher suggested, had been as available to anyone for thousands of years as they were to Mendel. What a certain car rental firm claims to do, Mendel did—he *tried harder*: he concentrated his mental gaze for years on the vast jumble of apparently meaningless ratios of inherited characteristics in his peas, until he obliged these dumb, recalcitrant witnesses to confess their secret.

## V

In one of the popular recordings made about twenty years ago by the Weavers, the group sang its song but then fell completely silent until the leader said: "We will now sing the same song again—this time, louder." This is essentially what Dr. Dawkins has done in the two books he has published since *The Selfish Gene*.

The later of these books, *The Blind Watchmaker*, is pitched at about the same semi-popular level as *The Selfish Gene*—and has enjoyed an almost equal success. The earlier book, *The Extended Phenotype*, on the other hand, is a book that probably only a professional biologist could follow in all its details. Still, lay readers can certainly understand enough of it to see that its substance is essentially the same as that of the two more popular books.

To do Dawkins justice, the same song is sung softer, and better, in one part of *The Extended Phenotype*. This is the treatment of genetic determinism in chapter 2, which is distinctly better than the treatment of it implicit in *The Selfish Gene*. Someone had obviously convinced Dawkins between 1976 and 1982 that causation does not, after all, come in two grades: genetic or industrial-strength causation and an inferior, everyday non-genetic grade. Dr. Dawkins may reasonably be thought to



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have learned this truth at a disproportionate cost to the public, but it is undoubtedly a step in the right direction: that is, away from genetic puppetry theory.

The overall tendency of these two later books, however, is exactly the reverse: they are actually more puppetry-theoretical than the first one was. We read in *The Extended Phenotype* that "the fundamental truth [is] that an organism is *a tool of* DNA," and in *The Blind Watchmaker* that "living organisms *exist for the benefit of* DNA." Such statements abound in both of the later books, as they did in the first one. The difference is that they are not counterbalanced, as they were in *The Selfish Gene*, by such cheerfully inconsistent statements as the one I quoted earlier: that we have "the power to *defy* the selfish genes of our birth." Far from there being any "With one bound, Jack was free!" stuff in the later books, genetic puppetry theory, especially in *The Extended Phenotype*, is universal, unrelieved, and carried to the furthest lengths imaginable.

It really is, then, "the same song again, this time louder," in these two later books. But, alas, the song still makes no more sense than it did the first time. We and other organisms "exist for the benefit of DNA," forsooth! It is *impossible* to benefit an $H_2O$ molecule, or an NaCl molecule (that is, a water molecule or a table-salt molecule). Try it yourself if you don't believe me: launch a Help-a-Water-Molecule Week and see how well you get on.

In reading Dr. Dawkins, one often suspects that (in Wittgenstein's phrase) a certain picture holds him captive. A picture, namely, of an exceptionally vain author, or parent, or photographer, who delights in surrounding himself with his own publications, or children, or self-portraits. But it can hardly be necessary to say that *genes* do not and cannot delight in the proximity of the copies they have made of themselves, or delight in anything at all. They cannot even know when they have made a copy of themselves, after all.

No, you and I are not being used by our genes for their own selfish benefit. There are people who are afflicted with incorrigible delusions of being manipulated, and then again there are confidence men. But there are no "confidence genes": genes just do not have what it takes for that kind of work, either in the way of brains or of bodies.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# *Bedtime Stories*

ELISAVIETTA RITCHIE

Begin with simple themes:
A milkmaid on her way to the stream
stumbles on a gold brooch. A princess
stabs her finger on a quill.

In the presence of his ministers
a king scratches mosquito bites,
a horse breaks from his stall,
charges over enemy terrain.

From then on, kingdoms crash,
winds howl down castle chimneys,
vipers emerge from the bathhouse,
there's a drop in agricultural statistics.

Or a tadpole swallows the brooch
without further metamorphosis,
the princess completes
her Ph.D. in herpetology,

the king goes fishing, the caught pike
plea-bargains but ends up



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the bouillabaisse anyway,
and the king chokes on the brooch.

Suppose the milkmaid reaches the stream
for an assignation with the king,
but trips on the corpse of a cow, flees
and drops their baby into the marsh

where the gardener discovers and raises him
knowing when to prune a forsythia,
and the lad landscapes the palace, unaware
of royal genes but sensitive to mosquitoes.

However it starts, how to control it,
and why, or why not. Sunday mornings
in bed are especially fertile.
There's no telling what next.

✪ ELISAVIETTA RITCHIE's books include *Flying Time: Stories and Half-Stories*, *Tightening the Circle Over Eel Country*, and *Raking the Snow*.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# *Thomas Wolfe*

JOHN DICKSON

Spawned from the mountains.
Conceived by the haunting penetration
of night and trains, of time and the river
in the egg of impassive cities of people.
Cursed with a frenzy to melt into words,
his pencil somehow attached to his brain.
Obsessed by the book that would be his life,
pouring in it every cow and barn
every tree and house and restaurant face,
every eye, every voice, every aspect of love—
scribbled out in majestic prose, in bad prose,
in violent, troubled, driven prose
that fed on coffee and cigarettes
and kept him shut in his New York room
pouring out a niagara of words
that matched the matrix of his blood
as he constantly molded The Book! The Book!

Cartons and crates of prolific pages,
but who in his right mind would publish it all?
Or read it? Or write it?
More of a recluse with each rejection,
more introverted, disheveled and wild-eyed
young and unshaven and growing fat
hating his mistress, berating his friends
and all the while The Book
like a cancer, growing . . . growing . . .
storing his avalanche of words.
Finally an editor cut it in half,
forced its pages between two covers,
spanked it to make it breathe by itself



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and held it up for the world to see.
The remnants took on a life of their own,
the hydra-headed, deathless book
that spewed out pages night and day
like lava smothering a village
as it boils its way to fill up the sea.

A recurring pain that took root in his head
began blotting him out in the middle of thoughts,
in the middle of words,
blotting out pages that lay on the floor
and slicing his life into small chunks.
Until doctors decided to ease the pressure,
to release the fluid gathered there
by drilling a hole in his skull,
a small hole ever so carefully,
then stood back in wonder as all his words
and all his pages and chapters and books
and mountains and rivers and valleys and trains
and voices crying in the night
spurted three feet into the air.

✪ JOHN DICKSON's most recent book of poems is *Waving at Trains*. He received a 1990 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship for Poetry.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Lawrence A. Cremin

DIANE RAVITCH

Recently I participated in a panel discussion that began with the question, "Who was the most important teacher in your life?" The panel members took turns remembering grade school teachers who gave them whatever encouragement they needed to outgrow the confines of the place from which they started. Since there were about a dozen of us on the panel, not everyone had a chance to answer before we moved on to another question. But in the moments while I wondered if I would be called upon, I thought about my childhood teachers. I vividly remembered the grade school teacher who shook me vigorously by the shoulders whenever I was late for school and the one who tried (and failed) to make me into a right-hander. None of them filled the bill as the one who had had the deepest influence on my life. If I had been asked to respond, I would have to say that the teacher who most influenced me was Larry Cremin.

I was thirty years old when I first met him. At the time I was working as a part-time researcher for the Carnegie Corporation of New York, for whom I had just finished a report on the decentralization controversy that had paralyzed the New York City schools during the fall of 1968. The controversy fascinated me, and I spent many days in the library, trying to understand how and why the New York City public schools came to be administered by a single, vast, centralized agency. Although I had no particular qualifications for doing so, I decided that I wanted to write a book about the history of the city's schools. The two women for whom I worked, Margaret Mahoney and Barbara Finberg, suggested that I meet with Lawrence Cremin. He was, they said, the dean of historians of education, and the Carnegie Corporation had been supporting his monumental history of American education for several years.

I called Cremin's office and set an appointment for 6:00 P.M. on January 10, 1969, in his office at Teachers College, Columbia University. At our meeting, I explained to him that I wanted to write a history of the New York City public schools. He asked me what I had written before, and I mentioned a few articles and book reviews in small magazines. Anyone else might have politely ushered me out of his office after a twenty-minute interview; he spent two hours with me, listening to my ideas and suggesting books that I should read. Try writing essays rather than a book, he offered, thinking that I was surely biting off more than I could handle. I took notes, he waxed enthusiastic, and we parted. Perhaps he thought he would never hear from me again. Six months later, I brought to him the first 125 pages of the book that eventually became *The Great School Wars*, and he agreed to continue advising me informally. In 1975, I received a Ph.D. in the history of American education, with Lawrence A. Cremin as my advisor, and the book became the first published work accepted as a dissertation at Teachers College.

Larry Cremin's sudden death on September 4, 1990, shocked everyone who knew him. He was a month shy of his sixty-fifth birthday, and seemingly in good health. On his way to work, he had stopped for his customary cup of coffee across the street from Teachers College; there, within sight of the institution

DIANE RAVITCH is the assistant secretary for educational research and improvement in the U.S. Department of Education. She is the author of several books, including *The American Reader: Words that Moved a Nation*.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where he had spent his adult life, he suffered a massive heart attack. For days afterwards, people at Teachers College passed each other as if in a daze. His absence seemed impossible. It was as though everyone still expected to see him striding exuberantly down the hall on the second floor of Main Hall, his arms loaded with books, coatless as usual, a big smile on his face. It sounds improbable, but Larry Cremin infused the life of scholarship with a sense of jubilation. He loved teaching; he loved writing; he loved research. He was the consummate scholar and the consummate teacher. He was able to balance his scholarship and teaching so that each was enriched by the other.

He was born in 1925 in New York City to immigrant parents. His father and mother founded the New York Schools of Music, where students could learn to play any instrument for twenty-five cents a lesson. The young Cremin often worked in the school, where he taught piano. Although he was a brilliant student at Townsend Harris High School, a public high school for gifted youth, his parents expected him to enter the family business. Indeed, his father never ceased to be disappointed that his talented son did not study to become a concert pianist. His first publication—which does not appear on his résumé—was a book with a title like *Fun with Boogie-Woogie* (his wife does not remember the exact title and apparently no copies survive).

Cremin enrolled in the City College of New York and entered military service before his senior year. When he returned to finish college after the war, the availability of the G.I. Bill allowed him to enter graduate school at Teachers College, Columbia University. At first, he intended to get a degree in psychology and music, but he found himself drawn to the courses in history, politics, sociology, anthropology, and economics, which are called the "foundations of education" courses. While earning his master's degree and his doctorate, he studied with such men as George Counts, Harold Rugg, Bruce Raup, John Childs, Kenneth Benne, and Freeman Butts. Raup was the father of Cremin's future wife, Charlotte.

Cremin joined the Teachers College faculty in 1949, and his doctoral dissertation, *The American Common School: An Historic Conception* (1951), was his first scholarly work. He co-authored several other books about the schools and education in American society during the 1950s. Then, in 1961, he published *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957*, which won the Bancroft Prize in American history for 1962. It was the first time that a historian on the faculty of a school of education had won the prestigious Bancroft Prize; in 1961, as today, 120th Street, the street that separates Teachers College from the rest of Columbia University, is known as "the widest street in the world." Larry Cremin was one of the few scholars of education who managed to bridge that street and to win the respect of historians in the Columbia history department. The book established Cremin as a major historian, and he accepted a joint appointment in the Columbia history department in 1961.

*The Transformation of the School* became the indispensable book for students of American education because of its breadth of scholarship and its attention to the social and political context in which the schools were embedded. Three decades after its publication, it remains the authoritative work on the subject of progressivism in education. It was a pathbreaking book in several ways. Until that time, most books in the field were written as house histories by professors of education; for some reason, few historians who were not attached to schools of education found education to be important enough or interesting enough to write about, so they left it to the ex-superintendents and professors of education in schools of pedagogy. The school histories that flowed from the insiders tended to be narrowly pedagogical and anachronistic; typically, they searched the past for the roots of the public school, and they invariably celebrated the rise of the public school as the flowering of American democracy. Cremin's *Transformation* broke the mold; he wrote about the progressive education movement as an extension of the progressive movement in society, and he explored the complex and contradictory currents within progressive education. Most others in the field of educational studies wrote plodding, leaden prose. Not Cremin. He displayed a magisterial literary style, with occasional flashes of humor, free of the jargon that was the bane of educationist writing.

In the mid-1960s, Cremin began to describe a new way of looking at education that went beyond schools and other formal institutions



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of education. Cremin understood, as few other academics did at the time, that education did not mean only schools, and that to study education meant to study families, the media, patterns of socialization, and a host of other agencies and phenomena. In *The Wonderful World of Elwood Patterson Cubberley* (1965), he discussed the limitations of those historians who saw education solely in terms of what happens in schools. At this time, he began to conceptualize a new definition of education. He described education as "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, and sensibilities, as well as any learning that results from that effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended." His definition embraced self-education as well as instruction. It carried him beyond schools and colleges to the study of families, churches, synagogues, libraries, museums, summer camps, settlement houses, mass media, trade unions, plantations, and almost any other kind of institution that educate, directly or indirectly. Seen in this light, Cremin's parents were pioneer educators, not merely people in the music business.

Cremin began to examine what he called configurations of education, the networks of family, community, church, and school that surround a person and create a patterning of educative influences. In his annual lecture course on the history of education, Cremin distributed a reading list that was several pages long; he didn't expect his students to read all of the books on the list, but he wanted them to see how various was his vision of education and to make available a bibliography to direct them to the latest and best work in each stream of research.

Needless to say, Cremin had read all of the scores of books on his massive bibliography, and I believe he remembered them all as if he had read them only yesterday. Sometimes, during one of the many spontaneous chats that characterized our professional relationship, I would look at that large forehead and wonder how he was able to retain almost everything he had ever read or heard or seen. And I remember thinking more than once that it would be a tragedy if he ever died because there are so few people like him—so few who are as learned or as capable of making connections between what they know and the life that they live today, so few as persistently humane in their view of the relationship between learning and the life of society.

It was Cremin's latitudinarian conceptual approach to education that informed his masterwork, his three-volume comprehensive history of American education. The first volume, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607–1783*, was published in 1970; the second, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783–1876*, appeared in 1980; and the third, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876–1980*, in 1988. The second volume won the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1981. Each book is an elaborate historical tapestry, in which Cremin examines the shaping and transmission of culture in the United States through time. In each book, formal educating institutions like schools, colleges, and universities play a relatively small role as compared to the vast variety of other educational agencies that shape what Americans learn, study, think, know, and believe.

While working on his three-volume history, Cremin wrote several other books, including *Public Education*, *Traditions of American Education*, and *Popular Education and Its Discontents*.

Larry Cremin served as president of Teachers College from 1974 to 1984. Most college presidents find that they have little time for anything else; he, too, was engrossed in administration of the college, in fund-raising, and in public functions. But these were also Cremin's peak years of scholarship. During that decade, he maintained a relentless schedule of teaching, research, writing, and lecturing while managing the affairs of the College. He edited the Teachers College Classics in Education series, which includes more than fifty volumes. He served on numerous boards, including the Children's Television Workshop, the Dalton School, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He taught and lectured on campuses in the United States and around the world.

Cremin was deeply interested in the improvement of educational research, which he believed was key to educational improvement. Eager to raise the standards and status of education research, Cremin became a founding member of the National Academy of Education in 1965. His own work, of course, was exemplary, and it brought distinction to the entire field. He received numerous awards, including seventeen honorary doctor-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ates. He was elected to membership in the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Antiquarian Society, the Society of American Historians, and the Council on Foreign Relations. These are not precincts where one is accustomed to finding a faculty member from a graduate school of education. At his death, he was president of the Spencer Foundation, whose emphasis is on educational research, and Frederick A. P. Barnard Professor of Education at Teachers College. He maintained a schedule that would have left most people with no time to read or write or for family. Yet Cremin fulfilled all of his obligations while maintaining a prolific output; and he preserved time for his wife and his two children, David and Joanne.

A painstaking scholar and a gifted writer, Cremin loved teaching. His lecture classes were always packed. Well-organized and carefully prepared before classes, he spoke with verve and humor. His lectures were usually a dazzling display of his erudition, not because he wanted to impress his students—he didn't have to—but because he effervesced with intellectual vitality. Although he peppered his lectures with references to the latest research findings, to current scholarship, and to anecdotes from daily life, he never taught beyond the understanding of his students. I recall one class when he explained the essence of the New York accent—which he himself had—by writing the words "Long Island" on the board behind him and then carefully pronouncing it, "Long-g-guy-land." I don't recall the point, other than to poke fun at his own accent. When I was his student, I remember thinking that he was the best teacher I had ever had; he cared deeply about what he was teaching; his passion was contagious.

And remarkably, in this age of instant communications, of faxes and telecommunications, of stress-laden people who never have time to do what they want, Cremin moved with an air of serenity. In part, this was owing to his remarkable capacity for denial. If he was ever nervous or overwhelmed by the pressures of his work, he never showed it. I can't recall him ever admitting to having a headache or a cold (even when he had one) or any of the other afflictions that are common to mankind in the late twentieth century. While he was always willing to listen to my troubles or to the troubles of other confidants, he seldom admitted to any personal doubt, disappointment, or uncertainty. This came across not as arrogance, but as an expression of an inner serenity that radiated from him. He had, I thought, a sense of peace that came from doing exactly what he wanted to do and from doing it in exactly the way that he wanted.

He appeared to have perfected the ability to write for his severest critic: himself. He affected an air of indifference to what others thought. If he cared, he didn't let it show. I remember a seminar attended by a dozen or so students, when he brought in a book that had just been published; the book, a dense, scholarly volume, was a study of what people knew in the seventeenth century and how they learned it. Cremin said, "He wrote the book, published it, and let it go, just like that," and with an unusually demonstrative movement, he dropped the book onto the table around which we sat. It hit the table with a fairly loud smack. And I understood what he meant, and I was amazed. The author wrote the book that he wanted to write; he didn't care if the book was reviewed or sold; he did what he wanted and made no compromises to the market. I found myself wondering for days, even weeks afterwards, whether the author cared whether anyone ever read the book that he labored over for years. I never found out, and I guessed that this was the ascetic ideal of pure scholarship.

It seemed out of character, therefore, when he expressed concern to me one day about whether the second volume of his three-volume history of American education would be reviewed by the *New York Times*. This surprised me, because I had been taken in by his affectation of not caring what others wrote about his work. In reality, Cremin cared deeply about the way his work was reviewed by his peers, and he remembered every critical review that he ever received. Months after the second volume of his trilogy was published, a hostile review appeared one Sunday in the *Times*; the writer treated Cremin and the book contemptuously. The next day, I sought him out to express my outrage and found him exasperatingly placid, indeed completely unperturbed. The mask was on. "The best response," he said, "is to keep writing and moving forward." And he smiled his unique smile of assurance, the one that seemed to stretch from ear to ear. When he



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

received the Pulitzer Prize for the book a few months later, I thought that this was the ultimate vindication.

Although Cremin did not like controversy and eschewed polemics, he knew their value. In the mid-1970s, he invited me to write a review of the revisionist school of historiography for the National Academy of Education. The revisionist historians of education included a broad assortment of Marxists, neo-Marxists, and sixties radicals; their works attacked liberal historians like Cremin and Bernard Bailyn, as well as such liberal icons as John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Gunnar Myrdal, and they seemed to find malevolent intent in every instance of liberalism or progressivism. Cremin reviewed my manuscript as it evolved; he patiently explained to me the importance of maintaining a civil, measured tone. The point, he explained, was not to smash those you criticize, but to disagree in a tone that leaves open the eventual possibility of continued discussion. One of his favorite words, one that he taught me, was *comity*.

Larry managed to remain detached from most of the issues that agitated the academy. He had developed the critical distance that historians presumably have toward their subject, and he was positively Olympian in his attitude toward contemporary events, politics, issues, and people. He had passion, but it was passion for his work and passion for living; none of that passion got deflected into taking sides, even when he was the target. There were only two kinds of people for whom he expressed disdain: those who were lazy or incompetent or slipshod in their work as students or scholars; and those who were so opinionated that they deteriorated into ideologues. Larry had no time for either.

He knew that I could not resist engaging in controversy on the issues of the day, and he lent his encouragement. I often sought him out when I was in the midst of some great battle and invariably found comfort and moral support. I remember when I first wrote an article in a national publication. Much to my surprise and dismay, the article was attacked with ferocity by several critics. Over a cup of coffee in the Teachers College cafeteria, he told me that I should not be upset. "Your problem," he said, "is that you write too clearly. People know what you are saying. Most academics don't do that." He said my style was "Ravitchian," by which he meant a machine-gun use of declarative sentences and active verbs. "Is that bad?" I asked him. "Should I disguise my meaning?" "Absolutely not," he said. "Stick to your guns, just make sure you know your stuff. Don't overstate your case. And don't be afraid."

For years, I didn't publish anything until he had read it; he was a sharp critic, but never a harsh critic. When I was writing my first book, *The Great School Wars*, he said that he had to be careful not to "get his thumbprints" on my work. It was my book, he said, and I had to write it as I saw it, not as he saw it. From the outset, he defined his role as critic in a way that kept me from becoming his clone. He knew that I had to develop my own voice, and he wanted me to have my voice, not his. He didn't try to turn me, or any of his other students, into his acolyte. When I was writing *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945–1980*, he ended his comments on each chapter with this advice: "Go! Go! Go!" He knew that the worst affliction of any author (or student) was getting stuck, becoming lost in the maze of one's own research or overawed by what others have done with the same material.

Frankly, my biggest problem has always been Cremin's work. It seemed to me that he had written on every educational topic in so much depth and comprehensiveness that it left little for anyone else to do but quote him. When we talked about this, he discussed the issue of scale and pointed out that in one book he encompassed the entire holdings of the library at Union Theological Seminary in a single sentence. "No one's work is quite like your own," he said. "Just write; keep going."

I never made a career change without seeking his advice, because he was the only person I knew who could tell me what was right for me from my perspective. In the late 1970s, I was asked if I would take a seat on the New York Board of Regents, and I went to ask his blessing. He said, "Do you want to spend your time writing or commuting to Albany?" Other people could serve on the Regents or any other committee as well as or better than I; I had to stick to what I could do best, he said. So I turned down the offer. He was both mentor and friend, and his voice became internalized. I didn't want to disappoint him; I knew how he would react if I missed a deadline, if I did less than my best work, or if I made decisions that were inappropriate.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He loved aphorisms. He often cited Satchel Paige's advice, "Never look back; something may be gaining on you." That was to encourage the graduate student or young professor who needed to keep moving, finish the dissertation or the book. Sometimes he made up his own, on the spot. When I was trying to come up with a dissertation topic, he shot down one idea with this observation: "When you are traveling from New York to San Francisco, you should worry about the weather in San Francisco, not in New York." That was his way of telling me that the hot topic of the minute would not be so hot by the time I finished the dissertation in three to five years.

The aphorism of Larry's I liked best came from a story he heard from George S. Counts, who had been his teacher. Counts asked Charles Beard how long it would take him to sum up what he had learned from his studies of human history. At first, Beard said it would take about a week, but as he thought some more he decided that he could sum up everything in four great laws. To quote Cremin, "First, the mills of the gods grind slow but they grind exceeding small; second, whom the gods would destroy they first make mad; third, the bee always pollinates the flower that it robs; and, fourth, when it gets dark enough out you can see the stars." Cremin described these as "the Hellenic idea of Providence, the Greek concept of hubris, the Marxian principle of the dialectic, and the Enlightenment faith in progress."

His photographic memory never ceased to amaze me. It seemed to me that he remembered everything that he had ever read. Although I was not so sure that he read the daily newspapers, he did seem to have read every significant study, monograph, and book. He had two large offices at Teachers College, each chock full of scholarly books. One was his official departmental office, where he received visitors and held office hours. The books were neatly arranged on the shelves on two walls, from floor to ceiling. Directly behind his desk was a long shelf of books that had been written by his students. The other office was an unmarked hideaway, behind a solid wood door, a suite of two large rooms, each of which was lined floor to ceiling with books, with piles of books on the floor in front of the shelves. This was the office where he did his reading and writing. Few people, other than his wife and personal assistant, had the telephone number in this room; in my visits to the private office, I never heard the telephone ring. He had total privacy and seclusion there.

I could never understand what his filing system was, or if he had any filing system at all, but he knew where every book was. In the midst of a conversation, he might remember a quote, jump to his feet, and take out a book to illustrate a point. On one occasion, I interrupted him while he was reading a dissertation. He invited me in, we talked for a few minutes, and he said, "Wait a minute, I've got it." He skimmed a shelf, pulled out a book, and found a page, then a paragraph. He explained that he spotted a plagiarism in the dissertation, and he suddenly remembered the source. This confirmed my hunch that he had the knack of remembering everything he read.

Larry Cremin was the embodiment of old-fashioned virtues, yet he was always open to fresh research ideas and in the forefront of his field as a scholar. In manner, he was a gentleman, always courtly, gracious, and charming. When he held dinners at the President's House at Teachers College, he wrote out each of the place cards himself, and he usually played the piano for his guests. He refused to live in the President's House, however, because he did not want to lose his privacy. He was never condescending, and he had a knack for giving others his undivided attention. He had his peculiar ways. He refused to write on a computer, although he encouraged the development of computer laboratories and telecommunications programs in his institution. He wrote in longhand, on a legal pad, with a felt-tipped pen. No letter to him went unanswered. He never answered the telephone, although he eventually returned every telephone call. I can't recall that he ever wrote the introduction to someone else's book, nor can I recall him ever writing jacket "blurbs" for books. I once sent him a letter, imploring him to write the introduction to a collection of lectures that I was editing; I included a passport photograph of me looking sad, and said that only his affirmative response would cheer me up. He responded with a handwritten note, to which he attached a small photograph of himself in cap and gown, giving a lecture on some campus, saying that he was so busy doing things like this that he could not write the introduction to the volume. It was vintage



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Larry: personal, humorous, unabashedly protective of his time.

Larry Cremin was unfailingly cheerful and friendly, but he always maintained his privacy, that essential aloneness that kept him somewhat aloof without being unfriendly; he was always accessible without ever really being familiar. Many people could feel that they loved and admired him without feeling that they knew him very well. He listened sympathetically to people who were in the midst of nervous breakdowns, mid-life crises, and psychic panics, but he did not show that part of himself, if indeed it existed at all.

In recent years I saw less of Larry, because I was not teaching regularly and preferred to write at home. Others had closer professional relationships. Others had closer personal relationships with him. Still, whenever I stopped by, I sought him out. A few months before his death, he reviewed an article of mine that was published in the summer 1990 issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR (he was a former member of the board of editors of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR). I knew that I would always be able to turn to him for advice the way that other people turn to psychics and priests. He long ago became a permanent inhabitant of my brain, a mental and moral gyroscope, warning me whenever I wasted time or lurched too far in one direction or another. I suspect that he performed the same function for many of his former students.

Larry Cremin loved his work. He was the only scholar I have ever known who conveyed an unalloyed joie de vivre for the life of the mind. His wisdom, his clarity, and his sense of excellence inspired everyone that he met. He was the eternal optimist. I recall once that he laughingly said that we never recognize the giants among us until they are dead. As usual, he was right.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Luie's Gadgets

## A Profile of Luis Alvarez

GEORGE GREENSTEIN

Several years after the close of the Second World War, the physicist Luis Alvarez realized with a shock that he was having trouble at lunchtimes. In the lunchroom at the University of California at Berkeley, a subtle but all-too-common segregation of personnel had developed. The young people sat by themselves, talking physics. Off at the other tables sat the older and wiser heads—they were talking about the good old days. Alvarez recognized that he had been unconsciously avoiding sitting with the young, up-and-coming physicists. From being a hotshot himself, he had imperceptibly slipped into being a has-been. He was forty years old.

Not an uncommon situation. But Alvarez's response was unique. He hired two young graduate students, with the provision that, although he would nominally be their instructor, in reality *they* would be *his* instructors. He placed himself in their hands and pushed his desk close to theirs. After an initial period of consternation, the two students set to work teaching their boss the new physics.

Such vigorous, crisp moves were part and parcel of Alvarez's style. Nor did the role reversal appear particularly to bother him: there was not an ounce of pretension to the man, nor an ounce of sentimentality. He had been born in 1911 in San Francisco and died in 1988. His father was a doctor and a nationally known syndicated columnist for a chain of newspapers, writing regularly on health and medical matters. Luis's paternal grandfather was Spanish, but otherwise there was no Hispanic blood in his family. Luis's hair was intensely blond, and his features were elegant and finely chiseled.

Alvarez's greatest forte was an ability to push the state of the art of experimental physics to its very limits. He achieved this through a combination of an intense inventiveness and a deep familiarity with the latest technological advances. He was, in fact, in love with technology and was one of its most skilled practitioners. Commenting at one point on Lewis Carroll's mad hatter, he noted that the fumes from the liquid mercury used in forming felt often caused brain damage. This little tidbit was an element of Carroll's creation that Alvarez found worth mentioning. He was the quintessential gadgeteer.

Alvarez could no more refrain from invention than he could from breathing. In the midst of an illness so severe as to incapacitate him for most of a summer, he amused himself by attempting to build a better detector of gallstones. In the midst of an exhausting round of meetings in Washington while lobbying for development of the hydrogen bomb, he found time to stop off at RCA to see a demonstration of the newly invented color television (within months he was consultant to a firm founded to develop a commercially marketable set). By the time of his death, Alvarez held more than forty patents.

During the Second World War, Alvarez worked for several years at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on the development of radar. So prolific were his powers of invention that he was made the head of a group

✪ GEORGE GREENSTEIN is professor of astronomy at Amherst College. His most recent book is *The Symbiotic Universe*. Grateful acknowledgment is made to Walter Alvarez, Philip Morrison, and Jack Sandweiss for helpful discussions on Alvarez and his work.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whose sole function was to bring his new ideas into fruition. The group's official designation was Division 7, but everyone knew it as Luie's Gadgets. He invented the Ground Controlled Approach radar system for guiding airplanes to landing in bad weather. He invented a radar anti-aircraft system. He invented the radar bombsight. He invented VIXEN, an airborne radar set designed to detect enemy submarines, and one of the prettiest gadgets I know.

A radar set works by emitting a sharp pulse of radio waves and detecting the echo as it bounces off the target. It is like locating a nearby cliff in the dark by clapping one's hands. The problem is that the cliff can "detect" the sound of the clap more readily than we can detect its echo. In the early years of the war, Allied pilots found their primitive radar sets effectively useless in waging war against enemy submarines. They would detect the submarines easily enough, but the emitted radar signals also acted as a beacon, advertising the fighter's presence to the enemy. As the plane approached its target, the beacon would become still stronger, and the U-boat would promptly dive.

Alvarez could think of no way to mask this beacon. But he did think of a way to mask its significance. He guessed that the real problem was not so much the presence of the radar pulses as it was their increasing strength as the fighter plane approached. So he designed a radar set to emit a series of pulses of steadily *decreasing* strength. In his design, Alvarez was helped by a technical peculiarity: the strength of the beacon alerting the submarine to the presence of the aircraft depended on the inverse square of its distance, but that of the return echo as the inverse fourth power. This made it possible to adjust things so that the aircraft would receive an ever-more powerful echo as it approached its target, while at the same time the warning beacon received by the submarine would grow steadily weaker. Lulled into a false sense of security by this apparent evidence that the aircraft was flying away from him, the U-boat commander would not give the order to dive until suddenly pounced upon by the fighter.

Alvarez spent the latter part of the Second World War at Los Alamos working on the atomic bomb and took part in the mission that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. In his autobiography, *Alvarez*, he describes the event:

> The bomb took forty-five seconds to drop thirty thousand feet to its detonation point, our three parachute gauges drifting down above. For half that time we were diving away in a two-g turn. . . . Suddenly a bright flash lit the compartment. . . . A few moments later two sharp shocks slammed the plane.
>
> After we secured our equipment, we left our cramped quarters and looked out the window for the first time over Japan. By then [the pilot] was heading back toward Hiroshima, and the top of the mushroom cloud had reached our altitude. I looked in vain for the city that had been our target. The cloud seemed to be rising out of a wooded area devoid of population. My friend and teacher Ernest Lawrence had expended great energy and hundreds of millions of dollars building the machines that separated the U-235 for the Little Boy bomb. I thought the bombardier had missed the city by miles—had dumped Ernest's precious bomb out in the empty countryside—and I wondered how we would ever explain such a failure to him. [The pilot] shortly dispelled my doubts. The aiming had been excellent, he reported: Hiroshima was destroyed.
>
> We flew once around the mushroom cloud and then headed for Tinian. Japan looked peaceful from seven miles up.

The sole emotion expressed in this passage is a momentary horror that one of the two atomic bombs in existence might have been wasted. Conspicuously missing is any expression of deep remorse for having taken part in the destruction of Hiroshima. In fact, Alvarez was proud of his role in the development of atomic weapons. One of the photographs he chose to include in his autobiography was of him holding a model of a B-29 as his son sat on his lap. On several occasions he expressed scorn for those of his colleagues at Los Alamos who did express remorse. One might be tempted to interpret all this as yet another instance of the quintessential amoral scientist hard at work in the laboratory and far too concerned with his gadgets to concern himself with their ethical consequences. But I would resist this view. Alvarez thought long and hard about the morality of the atomic bombs, and he concluded that their use had been wholly ethical. On several occasions he referred to the massive loss of life, both American and Japanese, which their use averted; and he pointed to the long and sorry cycle of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dreadful wars that appears, for the time at least, to have been interrupted by the thermonuclear threat.

The central fact I would emphasize about the years at Los Alamos is that Alvarez enjoyed them. He liked working on the atomic bomb. He liked the challenge of clearing the ever-more daunting hurdles, of pushing forward into new technologies.

The transition in Alvarez's career after the war in which his students played so great a part was into the field of elementary particle physics. Alvarez was working at an accelerator that sped protons to nearly the velocity of light and slammed them into a target. Out of these collisions would emerge a spray of new elementary particles. Incomparably smaller than atoms, however, they were difficult to study. Alvarez plunged into the analysis of new means of detecting them.

In the corridor of the Berkeley physics building in those days stood a box several feet across covered with a sheet of glass. Within it drifted silvery clouds of alcohol droplets suspended in a gas. Every few seconds, suddenly and without warning, a track would appear in the clouds—a straight line of droplets. Each track was triggered by the passage of a cosmic ray, itself a high-energy elementary particle from space. An impressive demonstration: morning, noon, and night the chamber continued developing tracks, documenting the bombardment of the rays.

Within the gas filling this so-called cloud chamber, alcohol had been dissolved in such quantities as to be continually condensing into tiny droplets. The process of condensation was facilitated by the passage of the elementary particles. Thus, the appearance of the droplets along their paths: the chamber functioned as a detector. Other detectors used in those days employed stacks of photographic plates, the grains of which would be exposed by passage of the particle.

All such detection devices suffered from a variety of problems. Analysis of tracks left on the photographic plates was tedious and inefficient and required the use of a microscope. As for the cloud chamber, its sensitive region, although quite broad, was a mere few inches deep—not enough to get a good look at the particles as they whizzed through. Yet other chambers had a larger sensitive volume but suffered from the defect of uncomfortably long dead times. Minutes were often required after one detection for the alcohol to redissolve. Accelerators, on the other hand, emitted a spray of particles more like once a second. These inefficiencies of detection were one of the primary bottlenecks impeding the study of elementary particles.

One day at a conference, Alvarez found himself seated at a table with a number of cronies from Los Alamos. Predictably, the conversation revolved around the war. But seated next to him was a young post-doctoral fellow named Don Glaser. Alvarez turned to Glaser and began talking physics. Glaser told him about a new particle detector he had invented—not a cloud chamber, but a bubble chamber. It consisted of a liquid continually maintained at greater than boiling temperature, but prevented from doing so by high pressure. Upon expansion of a piston, the liquid would commence boiling. As with the process of condensation, so too with that of vaporization: there appeared a string of tiny bubbles along the tracks of particles.

Alvarez realized immediately that bubble chambers possessed enormous advantages compared to cloud chambers. Glaser's gadget had employed ether as its sensitive liquid: in his hotel room that night, Alvarez worked out with colleagues plans for a chamber based on liquid hydrogen. Such a chamber could be built with far larger sensitive volumes; it could be recycled not once a minute but once a second; and, because the liquid hydrogen was of such a high density, it could function as the target against which new elementary particles would be created.

Alvarez's first bubble chambers were a matter of inches in size; but ultimately he and his group constructed a monster chamber fully six feet long. The development of such chambers required the invention of not one but an entire range of new technologies. In later life, Alvarez commented that his group was not pushing the state of the art so much as sailing over the edge. "Dashing off into the scientific unknown isn't for the fainthearted," he has written. "You must believe you can find a way." At one point he and his people knowingly designed themselves into a corner, trusting they would eventually come up with a way around a seemingly insurmountable obstacle plaguing their design. All this was just the sort of daring, risky venture Alvarez liked best. It appealed to his can-do nature.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cleanliness was an important problem. Bubbles formed not just around elementary particles, but about the most microscopic of imperfections. A speck of dust or a bump in a wall could trigger the boiling of the liquid, thus jamming the detector with spurious signals. So the bubble chambers had to be utterly clean and their interior surfaces mirror-smooth. The difficulty of achieving this at first limited their sizes to a matter of inches. But Alvarez found a simple and characteristically pretty way around this restriction. While he kept their windows clean, the remaining surfaces of his chambers he allowed to be dirty. The extra bubbles then formed in profusion—*but precisely because his chambers were so* gigantic, they were off to one side of the windows and safely out of sight. Everyone knew in those days that you could never make a six-foot chamber perfectly clean. Alvarez realized that you did not have to make it clean perfectly.

The detectors that he and his group developed produced a flood of data on elementary particles. Even a single bubble chamber photograph contains a wealth of information, as anyone who has seen a reproduction can testify—and his chambers could churn out hundreds of thousands of such photographs in a day. No one would be capable of dealing with such an inundation. Alvarez developed automated methods of scanning the photographs. The programs that his group wrote were precursors to the modern fields of artificial intelligence and pattern recognition by machine.

Liquid hydrogen can be deadly dangerous. If even the slightest leak develops and the liquid hydrogen gets out into the air, the stuff is ferociously explosive. The Cambridge Electron Accelerator, just off Harvard Square and operated by a Harvard-MIT collaboration, once suffered a catastrophic explosion of its bubble chamber. The roof of the building was blown upwards and then plunged down upon the support pillars; the pillars collapsed under the impact, and thousands of tons of concrete rained down upon the accelerator. All the cables caught fire, and a poisonous smoke spread throughout the laboratory. But not once in all their years of bubble chamber work did the Alvarez group suffer a serious accident.

The 1950s were the glory days of elementary particle physics at Berkeley. With their new detectors, Alvarez and his people dominated the field. There were periods in which only they had access to certain phenomena. The theoreticians hovered about, peering excitedly over their shoulders as the data streamed in. Particle after particle was discovered, particles whose properties were not just new and unfamiliar, but for which entirely new categories of explanation were required.

Physicists were elucidating the ultimate building blocks of matter. It is worth pausing to marvel that such fundamental units of construction even exist. Objects as diverse as stones and trees, as automobiles, as our bodies and the very stars themselves—*that all these are built from the same elementary particles must rank among the most remarkable of discoveries.* But the question of what these fundamental units are has undergone a considerable evolution.

The Greeks argued for earth, air, fire, and water. More recently people felt they were atoms. The multitude of chemical elements, however, each with its own atom, posed a problem for the view that at heart the nature of matter was simple. Furthermore, by the early years of this century it was recognized that even atoms themselves were constructed of yet smaller particles. These particles were the protons, neutrons, and electrons; and I myself was taught in college that to these three particles—we called them "elementary" back then—all the bewildering complexity of the world could be reduced. A few other particles were then known: the pion, the muon. When I thought about these interlopers, I was forced to admit that I had not the slightest idea what function they played in the nature of matter, but to tell the truth, I did not think about them very much. The picture was too pretty.

The 1950s and 1960s changed all that. The few particles known when I was a student turned out to be the mere tip of an iceberg. The roster has kept growing. Furthermore, as it did, patterns began to emerge, patterns whose existence had previously been unsuspected. Gradually it came to be realized that the very simplicity of the early view had been an obstacle to the understanding.

The discoveries made possible by the bubble chamber led to a revolution in ideas of the ultimate nature of matter. Protons and neutrons are now known to be composed of yet smaller particles termed quarks. The success of the quark model in accounting for sub-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

atomic phenomena is impressive. But it is worth noting that this picture, too, suffers from certain difficulties. The number of particles it takes to be truly elementary, for example, has increased considerably over the years from what was initially three to at present twelve. Newer and more speculative ideas increase the number of elementary particles still further. Is yet a further proliferation in store?

If history is any guide, future work may well reveal yet a deeper level of the organization of matter. Such particles as quarks, which we now think of as elementary, may themselves turn out to be composed of something else. But will this continual redefinition of our ideas ever end? *Are* there fundamental building blocks of matter? Or is the process of peeling away successive layers of the onion never-ending? And another question: if we finally do discover the truly elementary particles, how many of them will there turn out to be? Surely it is only our prejudice that at heart the world is simple. But perhaps, in the long run, it will turn out to be complex.

In the spring of 1954 Alvarez testified at the hearings in which J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the research effort at Los Alamos, was ultimately stripped of his security clearance. One of the first questions Alvarez was asked at the hearings was whether he wanted to testify. He replied, "I certainly find it an unpleasant duty, but I consider it to be a duty to be here." The sense of duty, and of conflicting duties, marks much of Alvarez's attitude throughout this episode. He had not been subpoenaed but had been requested to testify, and his job at Berkeley would not have been jeopardized had he refused—he had never, so far as I can tell, so much as flirted with radical politics. Ernest O. Lawrence, simultaneously his friend, mentor, and boss—and a man whom Alvarez deeply admired—had refused to testify and told him not to. In his autobiography, Alvarez speaks of "disobeying" Lawrence in this matter—a term I find somewhat curious, more appropriate to a youngster than to someone of Alvarez's stature at the time. Lewis Strauss, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, had phoned him at his home and appealed to his sense of duty, predicting that he wouldn't be able to look himself in the mirror for the rest of his life if he refused. Strauss seems to have known his man, and Alvarez agreed.

His testimony was relatively short. Much of it concerned his efforts to push for development of the hydrogen bomb and his disagreements with Oppenheimer, who opposed it. He expressed his admiration for Oppenheimer—as well as for Oppenheimer's opponent Edward Teller. He described Oppenheimer as "one of the most persuasive men that has ever lived," and spoke of his sense of Oppenheimer's pervasive influence in the opposition among scientists to the bomb:

> Every time I have found a person who [opposed the bomb], I have seen Dr. Oppenheimer's influence on that person's mind. I don't think there is anything wrong with this. I would certainly try to persuade people of my point of view. . . .
>
> Dr. Evans: It doesn't mean he was disloyal?
>
> Alvarez: Absolutely not, sir.

This marks the only point during the hearings when Alvarez was asked this crucial question.

As someone too young to have been politically conscious during the Oppenheimer episode, I will not comment on the rightness or wrongness of Alvarez's having agreed to testify or on the substance of his testimony. But in talking to older colleagues, I have heard every shade of opinion expressed, and all of it expressed strongly. One colleague who knew Alvarez well has told me that Alvarez should have refused to testify. Another person, who knew him equally well, said that it took more courage to testify than it would have to have refused. Yet another colleague described the hearings as a witch hunt and felt that anyone who did not support Oppenheimer at every juncture was open to being used as a tool against him—and that Alvarez should have known this.

The Oppenheimer hearings polarized physicists as no other event in recent history. In a famous episode, Oppenheimer's opponent Edward Teller encountered two friends while walking with a colleague shortly after the hearings: the friends shook the colleague's hand but refused even to acknowledge Teller's existence. The bitterness has continued unabated to this day, and because of his testimony Alvarez is generally regarded as having belonged to the Teller camp. "Luis Alvarez, wasn't he that son of a bitch out at Berkeley?" inquired a colleague when I mentioned his name not long ago.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Was he a son of a bitch?" I responded.

"Well, I never knew him personally, but I understand that he was."

In his autobiography, Alvarez wrote that he was not aware of having lost any friends as a result of his testimony. Nor do I believe that the prospect would have dissuaded him from testifying. He was, in fact, a man of immense self-confidence. Once he made up his mind about an issue, he was not one to stew over it.

Alvarez was crisp. Alvarez was cool. Gruff and plainspoken and devoid of pretension, he had no use for pretension in others. His wit was sharp and at times cruel, his intelligence utterly clear and to the point. There was something almost military about him. In contrast to most scientists, Alvarez admired and respected the military. At Los Alamos he enjoyed singing soldiers' songs, and during a wartime stay in England he felt honored to associate with the pilots fighting the Battle of Britain. In the early 1960s he chaired a committee on limited war and invented a night-sight scope for use in Vietnam.

He was a man of strong opinions: his political views were personal, idiosyncratic, and characteristic of no particular line. But one of his opinions was that only the opinions of an expert were worth listening to. Awakened by the telephone in the middle of one night in 1968, he was told by a reporter that he had just won the Nobel Prize for his bubble chamber work. Lying in bed after hanging up, he talked things over with his wife. Then and there he resolved never to sign petitions or otherwise express a political position solely on the basis of his status as a Nobel Prize winner. Expertise as a physicist gave him no right to make pronouncements about anything other than physics.

Alvarez could be kind and charming. He would go any lengths to help someone he respected, and he was a person who could enthusiastically shake the hand of someone who had had a better idea than his own. When he went to Stockholm for the Nobel ceremony, he acknowledged his indebtedness by inviting members of his research group to accompany him and personally paying their travel expenses.

But he did not always make a point of setting others at their ease, and there were those who found him intimidating. He was a man who formed strong judgments of people, and those whom he considered unworthy were utterly dismissed from consideration. Nor was he one to dissemble his opinions—he once summed up the position of a colleague who disagreed with him by saying that "B———'s theory is that our theory is wrong."

Alvarez's autobiography *Alvarez* is written in a crisp, no-nonsense style that I find utterly refreshing. There is much wisdom in it, and it is presented with an utter absence of sentimentality. Narrowly having missed discovering atomic fission, he comments, "I'm probably lucky to have missed the discovery of fission. I doubt I had the maturity at twenty-seven to handle the burden of having made one of modern science's greatest discoveries." Elsewhere he recounts how he independently rediscovered artificial radioactivity. His only comment was: "If I hadn't been three years too late, I would have certainly told someone about it."

Alvarez's bubble chamber work marked an important point in the evolution of his research style—and in the style of physics as a whole. It required a large team in which the individual scientist became something more like a manager than an independent agent. By now this evolution in scientific research has proceeded so far that a recent paper on elementary particle physics lists fully ninety-nine co-authors from institutions in America, Japan, China, Korea, and the Philippines (many of these co-authors have never met one another). Alvarez, who was in many ways most comfortable working alone or in small groups, was instrumental in leading physics into the era of giant consortiums.

In later years Alvarez's groups became smaller, the projects more idiosyncratic, inventive and, to me at least, more delightful. Perhaps the prettiest of all involved the famous Zapruder movie of the assassination of President Kennedy. He first became aware of this film when individual frames were published by *Life* magazine three years after the event. He spent the better part of that Thanksgiving weekend poring over the film, studying each individual picture as he had once studied bubble chamber photographs. His attention was drawn by a set of brilliant, parallel streaks marking certain of the frames. They were images of the sun, reflected off the body of the presidential limousine. Most of the time Zapruder had tracked the motorcade perfectly



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with his camera, and the reflections appeared in the movie as tiny points of light. But in certain of the frames, the points were elongated into streaks.

It occurred to Alvarez that such elongations would have arisen had Zapruder involuntarily jerked at these moments—and that he might have done so upon hearing the sudden sounds of gunshots. His suspicion was confirmed when a news organization staged a reenactment of the event and discovered similar streaks in their films. Thus, Alvarez realized, he could count the number of shots fired at President Kennedy by counting the number of frames showing streaks. The results he obtained in this way discredited conspiracy theories of the assassination. He was also able to show that a sudden backwards snap of the President's head arose, not because he had been hit by two bullets from opposite directions, but from the momentum carried by the jet of brain matter expelled by the bullet, again arguing against the conspiracy theory.

In the early 1970s, Alvarez spent a good deal of time on the telephone talking with his son Walter, a geologist. They were doing what scientists like best: bouncing ideas off each other, trying out schemes for this and that. Out of their discussions there developed the last major shift in Luis's career, and a remarkable new insight into the cause of the extinction of the dinosaurs. Like most discoveries, this one came about through a chain of stray circumstances and unforeseen breaks.

The dinosaurs, largest land animals ever to have existed, were an extraordinarily successful group that survived for 120 million years before suddenly becoming extinct about 65 million years ago. Their extinction constitutes one of the most famous mysteries in all of science. There is a proposal that their eggs were eaten by the mammals. There is a proposal that they died of diseases to which they had not developed resistance, contracted when they migrated across newly formed land bridges. There is a proposal that they died of the cold and another one that they died from too much heat. Someone once said that they died of constipation.

The geological stratum marking the extinction event is known as the K/T (for Cretaceous/Tertiary) boundary. Walter's interest in the boundary was "an offshoot of an offshoot of an offshoot," as he puts it. In 1973 Walter Alvarez was interested not in dinosaurs but in an entirely unrelated matter, one that took him to a gorge outside Gubbio, a small town north of Rome. The data he obtained there turned out to be of little use for his original project, but he realized that the rocks there contained a wealth of other information, and he returned several summers for other purposes.

With him at Gubbio was a paleontologist who had done her thesis on the K/T boundary. Often the two would walk up and down the gorge chatting, and every time they passed the K/T boundary, she would tell him something about it. It was, indeed, a striking geological formation. The rocks above and below are a pretty shade of pink. But for about a foot below the boundary they are bleached white, and the boundary itself is marked by a centimeter-thick layer of clay.

In their telephone conversations, Walter mentioned to his father that an important question was how great a span of time this clay represented. Eventually they hit upon an ingenious method of measuring the duration of this interval during which the dinosaurs became extinct. The method was to use the rate of infall of meteors as a clock. Every hour of the day microscopic meteors—tiny bits of fluff, grains of sand—impinge upon the Earth. Halted in the upper atmosphere, their remnants drift unnoticed down upon our heads in a continual rain of extraterrestrial material. Contained within the rain are traces of the element iridium. Rare upon the surface of the Earth, iridium is more common in meteors. The Alvarezes' plan was to measure its concentration in the boundary layer. By comparing this with the known rate of infall in meteors, they would be able to determine the interval of time over which the layer had formed.

Crucial to this scheme was their ability to measure accurately the concentration of iridium in rocks. There had been a previous measurement of this concentration, and based upon it the Alvarezes felt there was enough present for their technique to work. It later developed that this measurement had been in error: had the previous investigators done the job correctly, Walter and Luis would have decided their scheme had little likelihood of success, abandoned the project, and never would have made their discovery.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Frank Asaro and Helen Michel joined them in their project. They operated a lab at Berkeley that measured the iridium concentrations. Asaro, in fact, was dubious about the scheme and limited the number of samples to be measured to twelve. Walter carefully selected his samples, turned them over, and promptly forgot about the whole thing. Eight months later Asaro walked into his office and told him that he had his results, but that Walter wasn't going to believe them.

They had found that the concentration of iridium at the K/T boundary was hundreds of times higher than in the adjacent rocks. Furthermore, independent evidence existed to show that this extraordinarily high concentration could not possibly indicate an anomalously long period over which the boundary clay had formed. Something must have happened to interrupt the normally steady ticking of the meteor "clock."

Walter and Luis never did succeed in measuring the duration of the extinction event, but they had inadvertently stumbled upon something far more interesting. By now the iridium excess has been found at the K/T boundary throughout the world, both on land and under the sea. Some agency brought an enormous influx of the element to the Earth just when the dinosaurs became extinct, and it appears to have been spread uniformly about the globe. For a time the Alvarezes considered the possibility that the stuff had been ejected in an explosion of a nearby star, but the pattern of abundances of various isotopes argued against such an explanation. Eventually they began thinking about the impact of a giant object.

Such an object would have had to have been close to the size of Manhattan to account for the quantity of iridium in the layer. That is a typical size for a comet or an asteroid. The effects of a collision of such a body would have been a cataclysm of unparalleled magnitude. Traveling at perhaps one hundred thousand miles per hour, its top would have still been in the upper reaches of the atmosphere at the moment its base struck the ground. The thing would have dug a crater as much as one hundred miles in diameter and released one hundred billion times more seismic energy than a giant earthquake. Had it struck in the ocean, it would have punched all the way down to the ocean floor as easily as a hammer slamming down upon water spilled upon a table.

But devastating as these effects were, they were not sufficient to account for the worldwide nature of the extinction. Dinosaurs on, say, the other side of the globe would hardly have noticed. This conundrum puzzled the team for some time. Asaro recalls that Luis invented a new scheme every week for six weeks, shooting down each one in its turn.

Eventually he hit upon the idea of global darkness. The impact, he calculated, would have pulverized enormous quantities of rock. The debris, spread by the force of the blast entirely about the Earth, would have remained within the atmosphere for months, blocking out the sunlight. A worldwide winter would have ensued, interrupting the growing cycle of plants and thus disrupting the food chain upon which the dinosaurs depended. The so-called "nuclear winter" scenario, put forward several years after this proposal, was quite similar and in fact owed much to it.

This theory of dinosaur extinctions triggered one of the most intense scientific debates of recent years. In 1979 Walter Alvarez attended a conference on the K/T boundary to present their ideas. "[I] thought the paleontologists would be delighted to learn what caused the extinctions," Luis wrote in his autobiography. "Walt knew better." But even Walter was surprised at the vehemence of the opposition.

Resistance to new ideas is commonplace, within science as well as outside it. The ideas and points of view of one's field, won at such cost by untold numbers of workers, are precious. The sense arises that they are one's own property, to be zealously guarded against outside depredations. Science, in fact, is a community, and like all communities scientists have a tendency to close ranks against outsiders. It did not help in this regard that the Alvarez theory sounded so much like science fiction. "Some people at the conference were exhilarated and excited," Walter told me. "But most of the people working on the problem just wished we'd go away."

My own guess is that much of the opposition to the theory stemmed from powerful historical causes. The notion smacked of turning back the clock, of returning to a discredited form of explanation in geology. The birth of that science in the late eighteenth century was marked by intense debates between two schools of thought, uniformitarianism and catastrophism. The uniformitarians held that ev-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ery geological formation could be understood as having been caused by processes under way at the present epoch: mountains by slow uplift, canyons by incremental erosion. The catastrophists, on the other hand, resisted this notion. "No river has deepened its channel one foot," wrote George Greenough, founder and first president of the Geological Society of London. "No amount of time could enable Nature to work wonders." Rather these wonders were evidence of ancient cataclysms.

Greenough's use of the word *wonders* was no accident. The aim of many of the catastrophists was avowedly religious. These people wanted to reconcile the emerging discoveries of paleontology with the biblical account of creation. Seashells found in the Alps were presented as evidence of Noah's flood; fossilized remains of animals never before seen as evidence of a time before Genesis, long since destroyed by catastrophes. Furthermore, these catastrophes were held to lie outside the normally operating laws of nature. They were special, unique events. With this, the debate between catastrophism and uniformitarianism became a debate on the very possibility of science. To my mind, the most penetrating of all the critiques of catastrophism was leveled by the Scottish geologist James Hutton, who emphasized that the tenets of that doctrine rendered the world fundamentally incomprehensible. "If a stone which fell today were to rise tomorrow," he wrote, "there would be an end of natural philosophy. Our principles would fail, and we would be no longer investigating the rules of nature from our observations."

I do not want to give the impression that all catastrophists were religious in their motivation. Many were competent, serious scientists, and they had good evidence for their claims. Extinctions are an example, for the geological record often shows sudden discontinuities in fossil types. But Darwin always claimed that the discontinuities were illusions, induced by gaps in the geological record: not every epoch was well represented by fossils, and such abrupt shifts were to be expected. In the long run, such arguments as these triumphed, and catastrophism was demoted to the oblivion that awaits all defeated theories.

My hunch is that the Alvarez theory of dinosaur extinctions encountered such intense resistance because it appeared on first glance to be reinvoking the doctrine of the catastrophists. In reality, of course, it escapes the criticisms leveled against the biblical catastrophists by widening the sphere of discussion to include other bodies of the solar system. Collisions with asteroids or comets, far from being supernatural events, then become mere traffic accidents. Furthermore, while the geological record of extinctions is indeed often spotty, in some instances—and the K/T extinction is one—it is not. Walter Alvarez is of the opinion that the time has come for geologists to realize that a full understanding of the geological record will require both gradual and sudden processes.

To my mind one of the most remarkable aspects of the birth of the impact theory of dinosaur extinctions is that this was not the first time it had been proposed. Several years earlier the chemist Harold Urey had put forward essentially the same idea. But in spite of Urey's impeccable scientific credentials (he, too, was a Nobel laureate), scientists paid not the slightest attention to his proposal. By the time of the discovery of the iridium layer, it would have been difficult to locate a geologist who was even aware of Urey's theory. It was this layer that Urey had lacked and that gave his theory its compelling force. This immense power of a single observation was what Alvarez loved about experimental physics. Throughout his career, this is what drove him: the marvelous power of facts and of quantitative measurements, and, above all else, the beauty and cleanliness of hard data.

Early in Luis Alvarez's career, much of his work in nuclear physics had been motivated by one particular review article. Whenever the author of this article had said a phenomenon would never be observed, Alvarez set out to prove him wrong. This, he said, would have made both of them happy.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Baron Haussmann and Modern Paris

DAVID P. JORDAN

Paris has not been universally loved. Bernini, Mozart, Wagner, Tolstoy, among many others, disliked the city, but more for the way they were treated by its citizens than for its appearance. The Paris we find worth looking at endlessly is the Paris given its present form, with a few notable exceptions, during the Second Empire, under the stern and purposeful direction of Baron Haussmann, Emperor Louis Napoleon's Prefect of the Seine. His name is permanently linked to his work.

Georges-Eugène Haussmann has been remembered as a historical cliché: he is the man who made Paris immune to the kind of urban insurrection that had troubled and toppled governments from the time of the Fronde in the seventeenth century to the June Days of 1848. Like so many historical clichés, this one settles for too little. Strategic concerns were important in the transformation of Paris carried out by Haussmann from 1853 to 1870, but what the prefect and his master meant by strategy was more than broad boulevards, barracks built in riotous neighborhoods, the destruction of the rabbit-warren of narrow streets so easily barricaded. Pacification through the manipulation of urban space, social control by the artificial creation of real-estate values, all accomplished under the intimidating symbolism of Imperial authoritarianism, these go well beyond cavalry charges and clear fields of fire. The urbanization of Paris was nothing less than a transformation of the political and social geography and culture of the capital.

✪ DAVID P. JORDAN is professor of history at the University of Illinois at Chicago and author of *Gibbon and His Roman Empire*, *The King's Trial*, and *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre*. He is currently at work on a study of Haussmann and the making of modern Paris.

In his *Mémoires* Haussmann describes his route from home to school, near the Pantheon:

> I used to cross the Chaussée d'Antin, and after some detours reach the rue Montmartre and the porte St. Eustache; I crossed the square of Les Halles, not then covered, amidst the red umbrellas of the fishmongers; then rue des Lavandières, rue St. Honoré, and rue St. Denis. The Place du Châtelet was a shabby part in those days. . . . I crossed the old pont du Change . . . then I skirted the old Palais de Justice, with the shameful mass of low cabarets that used to dishoner the Cité on my left . . . continuing my way by the pont St. Michel, I had to cross the miserable little square where, like a sewer, the waters flowed out of the rue de la Harpe, the rue de la Hachette, and the rue St. André des Arts and the rue de l'Hirondelle, where at the end appeared the sign of Chardin, the perfumier, like a false note. At last I launched into the meanderings of the rue de la Harpe, then had to climb the Montagne St. Geneviève and arrive, by the passage of the Hôtel de'Harcourt and the rue des Maçons-Sorbonne, the Place Richelieu, the rue de Cluny and the rue des Grés, at the Place du Panthéon at the corner of the Faculty of Law.

This is the authentic Haussmann. He had little affection for old Paris—compare his distaste and impatience with the affectionate descriptions of Balzac. Haussmann wanted to go directly from one point to another of the city. His commendable disgust at the open sewers is tempered by his contempt of the picturesque and his scorn for a perfume shop closing the perspective of a street. Haussmann's preferences were for the classical city and, above all, convenient, direct transportation. Haussmann needed to impose order on his physical surroundings, as he did on his highly disciplined life. He needed to make urban space rational, geometric. These quirks of character, coupled with a complete faith in



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

administration as the instrument of social transformation, made him the perfect instrument of the emperor. Haussmann's aesthetic preferences and obsessions were easily wedded to the emperor's desire to hold his throne partly by holding Paris. Haussmann was a man made by nature and formed by experience to accomplish the transformation of Paris.

Louis Napoleon had planned and executed the coup d'état (1851) that would make him emperor in 1851. He understood the tactics of street politics. Haussmann himself had fought in the "Three Glorious Days" of the 1830 Revolution, in which he was slightly wounded. Both men knew that a successful Paris insurrection needed the alliance of the bourgeoisie and the urban poor, the "dangerous classes" in Louis Chevalier's well-known hypothesis. The February Days of the 1848 Revolution (not to mention the insurrections of 1834 and June 1848) had only reinforced these convictions. Napoleon and Haussmann were determined to prevent another revolutionary alliance. The new boulevards and barracks were designed to contain riot, not prevent it; the demolitions were intended to deny the center of Paris to any insurrection. The boulevards isolated the "dangerous classes" from the bourgeoisie and at the same time cut them off from the center of the city, which was cleansed of its riotous population and then made extremely difficult to capture and hold. Simultaneously, the Paris *banlieue* was incorporated into the city (1859) to bring the entire urban sprawl under one administrative umbrella and thus deprive the Paris poor of reinforcements from the suburbs.

Narrowly strategic considerations were important only for particular projects in the transformation of Paris. The question of the St. Martin canal, in the east end of Paris, was one such consideration. In the bloody June Days of 1848, when the army recaptured the barricaded streets of eastern Paris from the working class, it was held up for days at the canal. Haussmann had the city of Paris purchase the canal in 1861, and he lowered it six meters. "After many anxious nights of insomnia," he says in his *Mémoires*, the strategic solution came to him. He proposed to have a new street, the current Boulevard Richard Lenoir, cross the canal. This would provide an uninterrupted route between the Château d'Eau (currently place de la République) and the place du Trône (currently place de la Nation), a military road into "the habitual center of . . . demonstrations" and nullify the canal as a barrier. He revealed the plan to Louis Napoleon, who personally visited the site and agreed that the new boulevard would permit the government to "take from the rear" the dangerous neighborhood of Saint-Antoine. For similar reasons the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was prudently moved from the Right Bank to the Left, where it remains, on the sleepy quai d'Orsay, far enough from the center of Paris to be out of the range of any street fighting.

The overarching general strategy was to hold the center of Paris. This determined much of Haussmann's most radical and controversial work. He proudly declares in his *Mémoires*—and note the choice of words—that in "less than five years, from 1855 to 1859" he accomplished the "gutting" (*éventrement*) of old central Paris, "the neighborhood of uprisings and barricades." This area he replaced with new boulevards. The inhabitants were forced out of the center of the city to be replaced by those who could afford the expensive new housing he built. The design of Haussmann and his master was not, as the cliché has it, to create streets too wide to barricade, streets where artillery could be deployed and cavalry charges mounted; it was to alter Paris in such a way that street fighting would be obsolete.

Perhaps the best argument against the purely strategic interpretation of Haussmann's work is that his boulevards transformed Parisian life not because they were military thoroughfares against urban insurrection, but because they created that unique aspect of *La vie Parisienne,* the life of the boulevard, and in 1866 gave the language a new word, *boulevardier,* one who frequents the great boulevards of Paris, who has *l'esprit de boulevard.* There is no direct evidence that Haussmann or Louis Napoleon envisioned *l'esprit de boulevard,* but there is also no more characteristic aspect of Parisian life even today.

So great was the problem and so complicated the solution that the transformation of medieval Paris into modern Paris, directed by Haussmann, was and has remained the largest urban renewal project in the history of west-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ern Europe. The sustained and purposeful intervention of an authoritarian, administrative state accounts not only for the scale and design of the transformation but also for its brutality and consistency. The work was done so well—all the projects Haussmann had begun but left unfinished were completed by the Third Republic—that it has endured to our own day. With the exception of the Commune of 1871, a unique episode that depended on war and siege and complete political collapse, French politics were not decided in the Paris streets for more than a century. The look of modern Paris, its social and political geography—despite the additions of the Eiffel Tower, the cathedral of Sacre-Coeur, the skyscrapers at Montparnasse and La Défense, the Front de la Seine, the gentrification of the area around the place de la Bastille—remains essentially as Haussmann planned.

The struggle for control of central Paris had been going on for centuries before Haussmann began his work. (One could argue that it still is going on.) To hold Paris one must control its center. The recent destruction of Haussmann's iron and brick and glass sheds at Les Halles, the central market of Paris since at least the twelfth century, is, along with the erection of the Georges Pompidou center at nearby Beaubourg, the last in a long series of battles to dislodge the *menu peuple* from the center of the city, to recapture Paris from the popular classes. Haussmann considered the Paris masses "impressionable" and "turbulent," a danger to any government. King Philippe Auguste had, in the twelfth century, built the original Louvre as a fortified residence beyond the walls of his capital to fend off his unruly subjects and to insure his personal safety. This, argues Haussmann, was a foreshadowing of Louis XIV's Versailles that definitely moved the royal government out of riotous Paris.

But those who would live in Paris, both before and after Louis XIV, needed other strategies. The founder of the Bourbon dynasty, Henri IV, in the first decade of the seventeenth century, was determined to live in and to hold his newly acquired capital. He built the place Royale (renamed the place des Vosges in the French Revolution). It is remarkable as the first residential urban square built on such a large and lavish scale, and as the first Paris project that intruded the classical city into the medieval city. It also cleared an important space in what was then the center of Paris and implanted there a new aristocratic population, a precedent for Haussmann. The place des Vosges remained a preserve of the upper classes until the time of the Revolution. It drew the aristocracy to the center of the city—as Versailles would shortly draw them away—and Henri's square was soon surrounded by fashionable *hôtels*. When the magnet of Versailles pulled the aristocracy to the west of Paris, where land was cheaper and plentiful, the Marais (as the area was called, having originally been swamp) became the residence for the great judicial families who built there in the eighteenth century.

But these wealthy and influential *parlementaire* families were already feeling the pressure from eastern Paris, the poor Paris. They were aware that only the "Gothic" pile of the Bastille separated their grand residences from the working-class neighborhood of Saint-Antoine—whence came the crowds that would soon dominate the city and the French Revolution. By the time the monarchy was forcibly returned to Paris, by the women who marched on Versailles on October 5–6, 1789, the capital was in the hands of the popular classes. The Tuileries, long deserted by the French kings, now became their prison, a melancholy chateau precariously afloat in a hostile and angry urban sea. Within a few years the *hôtels* of the Marais were abandoned and the area became what it was to remain until the 1970s, a poor, overcrowded, dilapidated neighborhood whose exceptional architectural endowment was left to decay through neglect or squandered by the vandalism of landlords who carved the *hôtels* into squalid apartments.

The shift of fashionable Paris from east to west, another phenomenon that stretches over centuries, was an important consideration in Haussmann's strategy. Under the Second Empire the exceptional development of western Paris, encouraged by the street building, the parks (especially the Bois de Boulogne and the Parc Monceau), and heavy government investment, went rapidly forward. Even if he wanted to, Haussmann could not reverse this movement, but he exploited it brilliantly. He shifted the center of Paris westward to the area around the Opéra where so many of the new boulevards converged. He transformed the old center, the Ile de la Cité and the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

neighborhoods immediately adjacent, into a museum of government buildings and monuments. The Hôtel de Ville, Notre Dame, the Palais de Justice, the Louvre, and the Tuileries all were detached from the squalid tangle of buildings that had grown up around them like barnacles on a ship's hull. Those who had lived here were expelled, and in place of teeming neighborhoods Haussmann left isolated buildings, monuments of the administrative state, statues commemorating a glorious past. The *parvis*, the open area in front of Notre Dame, is a striking example of this strategic aesthetic. The bishop's palace that was attached to the cathedral's south side was demolished, as were all the other structures that had developed around the venerable church. The *parvis* itself was made forty times larger than it had been in the twelfth century. Similar architectural surgery was done at the east end of the church, where a park was constructed. Notre Dame stood as she now stands, in magnificent (and historically inaccurate) isolation. Indeed, the entire Ile de la Cité, the cradle of Paris, was so violently transformed by Haussmann that it remains the best example of the meaning of *haussmannisation*, a word coined at the time to define urban renewal by demolition. What had been one of the most densely populated neighborhoods of Paris became a deserted *quartier*. This was the price paid to recapture the center of Paris from the "dangerous classes." The center of the city was made uninhabitable.

Unlike many French cities, Paris did not have an "organic" evolution in the nineteenth century. Occasional intervention by elites in response to the urban crisis of the 1840s and the disruptions of industrialism and immigration were not the instruments of Parisian transformation. The remaking of Paris was accomplished by men who knew what they feared and who were able to bring the irresistible might of the state to bear on the city and its population. The Left, especially the socialists, had been the most outspoken critics of European cities in the nineteenth century, but ironically it was the authoritarian state that made Paris anew. Haussmann was the ideal, almost providential, man to direct such work.

Descended of a Protestant family originally from Alsace, Haussmann was connected, on both his mother's and his father's side, to the Revolution and Napoleon. His paternal grandfather had served in the Legislative and Convention Assemblies of the Revolution and was, his grandson is careful to point out, away *en mission* during Louis XVI's trial. Even had Haussmann's grandfather been in Paris, the autobiographer assures us, he would have voted against the regicides. Haussmann's maternal grandfather was a Napoleonic general in whose company Haussmann remembers having met the great Napoleon, who admonished the child to grow up quickly and learn to mount a horse so he could join the Imperial service. From this grandfather Haussmann claimed the title of Baron, to which he was not strictly entitled (French nobility does not descend in the female line).

Haussmann was born in Paris on March 27, 1809, "in a small house between the court and the garden which was a part of the former property of the farmer-general Beaujon." A house, he continues, "that I had demolished to make the small *place* that marks the end of the Boulevard Haussmann and the beginning of the Avenue Friedland." Despite his robust good health as an adult, he was a sickly child who spent much time with his maternal grandparents in the country. He eventually attended Paris schools and took a law degree. For a man who would often be accused of having no aesthetic dimension, he showed an early talent for music, became a proficient pianist, wrote poetry—of, true enough, dubious artistic value—and loved nature, flowers, and gardening. Despite his years in the provinces, he remained a Parisian and always spoke proudly of his origins: "I am simply a Parisian, a Parvenu . . . out to make a name, even a controversial name, in his dear city."

The Imperial service Haussmann eventually joined was that of Napoleon's nephew, but he was a product, almost the perfect product, of the uncle's schools. He was neither architect nor ideologue, engineer nor urban planner. He was an administrator, a bureaucrat who had risen in the ranks and had a deep and untroubled faith in the capacity of administration to solve the great problems of his age. After more than twenty years of bureaucratic obscurity in provincial France, he was summoned to Paris in 1853 to be Prefect of the Seine, the most important administrative appointment in the administrative state. He brought with him a reputation for administrative ability, intelligence, efficiency, occasional intransigence, and no substantial pro-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vincial or Parisian patrons, except the emperor himself. He was a new man whose career had been made possible by the Revolution of 1789 and the Napoleonic reforms that followed, and whose opportunities were reinvigorated by the Revolution of 1848 and the rise of the second Napoleon.

Haussmann's mind worked through function and utility. He had little interest in ideas for their own sake, though he was well and widely read—even in English, which he also spoke—and had friendships with the poet Alfred de Musset and the novelist George Sand. Abstractions to him were only useful to the extent that they could be made concrete, manipulated for specific ends, controlled. These were precisely the attributes the Napoleonic schools imparted. Haussmann's psychology made him admirably receptive to such training. He had an obsessive need to order his life and physical surroundings and to impose his large, overbearing personality on the world. His *Mémoires* are filled with lists and catalogues. The route from his house to the Law Faculty in Paris is only one of many itineraries in his *Mémoires*. Each new provincial appointment is introduced by a description of how he traveled from one town to the next, which incidentally tells much about the difficulties of travel in France in the 1830s and 1840s. Each official residence he occupied has its rooms and furnishings catalogued. When he became Prefect of the Seine, this need to count and categorize intensified. "The gravel paths of the Bois de Boulogne cover 612,511 meters, the sandy paths 189,400, the paths of natural earth 275,500; all together 1,074,411 meters." By 1869 there were "560,625 meters of sewer pipe" in Paris, "of which 369,625 meters were of the new dimension of two-and-a-half meters by 1 meter 30." The conduits distributing water in Paris, he reveals, had "a total length of 705,350 meters" and were of small diameter when he assumed his responsibilities. By 1869 he had installed "1,547 kilometers of water pipe." Gas lanterns were carefully enumerated and compared to the quantity of oil lamps they replaced, and the number of chestnut trees he planted along the boulevards is similarly immortalized in ink. The members of each committee and commission he chaired as Prefect of the Seine are duly noted. Whatever the value of his poetry, his prose was neither elegant nor artful. His dicta on style in his *Mémoires* explain why. He "almost never" concerned himself with such things. He emulated the prose encouraged by the administrative corps, whose ideals were clarity and precision. His *Mémoires* and his official reports achieved these ideals.

Haussmann's career, after a precocious beginning, had been slow and was virtually over by the final years of the July Monarchy. After years of disappointment and bad luck—Casimir Perier, the prime minister and Haussmann's first patron, died in the cholera epidemic of 1832, and the duc d'Orléans, the heir to the throne and a school chum and patron, died in a carriage accident in 1842—Haussmann finally achieved a prefecture, on January 1, 1848. The next month the July Monarchy was overthrown. Haussmann never assumed his new post. He had risen only to the sub-prefecture of Blaye, an insignificant post whose only advantage for him was its proximity to Bordeaux. His wife's family was *bordelais*, and he had acquired land there.

Haussmann was no friend to the Second Republic proclaimed in 1848. After sitting out the uncertain first months following February 1848, he came to the attention of the newly elected Prince-President of the Republic, Louis Napoleon, who was ever on the lookout for adherents, especially useful and talented ones. Haussmann proved effective in those troublesome *départements* where there was resistance to Louis Napoleon's ambitions. He acquired the reputations of a *préfet à poing*, a tough administrator, and became the Prince-President's troubleshooter. His rewards were appointments as prefect, first of Bordeaux and soon after that of Paris. His gratitude and devotion to Louis Napoleon and the Bonapartist cause continued to the end of his life, on January 11, 1891, when he died, largely forgotten, in Paris.

Summoned to Paris to assume the prefecture of the Seine, Haussmann was received by Louis Napoleon, taken into the emperor's study, and shown a large map of Paris, carefully marked in three colors, indicating the new streets the emperor wanted built, or "pierced," in the descriptive French word. The colors indicated construction priorities. Haussmann, when he set up his command post in the Hôtel de Ville, where he also lived, had his own copy made of this map, which hung conspicuously behind his desk. He was thrilled by the task. Typically, he



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

considered himself better prepared "than one might suppose, to complete this complex mission." He slept soundly and peacefully that night, his "first Parisian night" in many years. He was undaunted by the emperor's vision of a transformed Paris. Although he had not lived in Paris for twenty-two years, and the emperor had not been in the capital for nearly thirty-five years, the two men embarked on its transformation.

The relative roles of Haussmann and his master in the transformation of Paris cannot be exactly fixed, but Haussmann is correct rather than modest when he describes himself as the "devoted instrument," "the principal worker on this colossal project." He was proud to be thought "the man responsible." Whatever the prefect's abilities and character, the transformation of Paris was only accomplished with the emperor's constant support, encouragement, and intervention. Haussmann and his master met practically every day to discuss the work, which is one of the reasons there is scant documentation of their relationship. The emperor had not only a general vision of Paris transformed—and he was heavily influenced by the years of exile he had spent in London—but a vision of specific things he wanted done. Many of the walkways in the Bois de Boulogne, one of his pet projects inspired by London's Hyde Park, were staked out by the emperor himself. But more often it was Haussmann who had to realize the emperor's grand visions. He wielded enormous power. He had the authority of a cabinet minister without the official designation and sat in on all meetings of the Council of State that concerned Paris. Adolphe Thiers quipped, with some reason, that, although Eugène Rouher was often thought the vice-emperor, "the vice-Emporer is the Prefect of the Seine." The emperor proposed, Haussmann disposed.

The major problem was, of course, money. Louis Napoleon insisted that the transformation be carried out without additional taxes. Haussmann, following a night of anxious conning of past Paris budgets, discovered the secret for rebuilding Paris. All the revelations he records in his *Mémoires* came to him at night. This one he likens to that of Archimedes, who asked only a place to balance his lever and he would move the world. Haussmann's own lever was to be the gradual and inexorable increase in the city's revenues that would result from its transformation. He proposed to apply the ideas about capitalism and social engineering then current in Saint-Simonian circles—a remarkable group of engineers and bankers, disciples of the utopian socialist, the duc de Saint-Simon, who had died in 1825. By unleashing capitalism, stimulated and directed by government investment, Haussmann borrowed against future revenues from augmented property values created by the *grands travaux* and generated enough new revenue to finance the transformation of Paris. Another source of new revenue would be the duty levied on everything, including building materials, that entered the capital. Opening Paris to development and banking on economic expansion now seems an obvious capitalist endeavor. In Haussmann's day, it was, at the least, thought unorthodox; it was a kind of alchemy, or so it seemed to many. Paris would pay for its own transformation. Jules Ferry, in a brilliant pamphlet, *The Fantastic Accounts of Haussmann*, a pun (in French the words for *account* and *tale* are homonyms) on the then enormously popular *Fantastic Tales* of E. T. A. Hoffmann, detailed some of these manipulations. Ferry was a prodigy of more conservative banking interests who much resented the success of Haussmann and his friends. It is worth noting that Haussmann left office no richer than he had entered. Haussmann's fall, in early 1870, initiated by inquiries into his fiscal policies, was the result of Louis Napoleon's liberalization of the authoritarian Second Empire. For years Haussmann had been protected by the emperor. Now it became expedient to dump the Prefect of the Seine. Economic legerdemain was a popular pretext.

The timid property owners of the July Monarchy, many of whom people Balzac's novels, had long clamored for more government investment in Paris and for modernization of the old medieval city; but few were prepared for the scale on which Haussmann operated, and even fewer liked his aggressive methods. He saw himself as a man who went "directly toward [his] goal, without allowing [himself] to be diverted." "This was not always easy," he concedes, "but it was a very simple rule of conduct and I made it my own." He was loathed by the conservative financial interests of the empire, distrusted by the property owners, hated by the political opposition, and, despite his intimacy with the emperor, never



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a part of the inner circle of the court. His public and official life was filled with polemics and quarrels. He increasingly became an encumbrance to an emperor determined to liberalize his empire so that he might pass it along to his son. In addition, Haussmann made some serious miscalculations. The formula of government investment to develop new neighborhoods, whose economic success would pay for the original investment and finance further development, produced some notable failures. The extension of the boulevard Malesherbes, for example, for which the Pereire brothers' bank donated the land because it would greatly enhance the value of their apartment buildings, never realized its expected millions. The Pereire Bank went under. The capacity of Paris to expand to the west, to absorb expensive housing, was not infinite. Haussmann also neglected the Left Bank, which consequently is one of the parts of Paris to retain some of its late-medieval charm, much to the financial chagrin of those who owned Left Bank property. He was also unpopular with a less self-serving group, those who loved old Paris, Balzac's and Victor Hugo's Paris, and lamented its destruction.

Criticism of Haussmann and his work began in the midst of the transformations and has continued to our day. Haussmann was combative and enjoyed the fray. The most serious public outcry came over his decision to confiscate a sizable portion of the beautiful Luxembourg Gardens, specifically the stocking gardens, to create a new street. He won the battle, as he won most of his battles, but it was to the detriment of Paris. It is as a destroyer that Haussmann has been most consistently stigmatized. He demolished old Paris and in place of its beauty and charm imposed dull uniformity. Karl Marx, defending the Commune of 1871 that set fire to a number of Paris buildings—including the sixteenth-century Hôtel de Ville, where Haussmann worked, and the prefecture of police and the Palais de Justice, which he built—called the "vandalism of Haussmann" worse than the depredations the "Christians perpetrated upon the nearly priceless art treasures of heathen antiquity." Haussmann razed Paris, said Marx, "to make a place for the Paris of the sightseer!" The criticism has stuck.

Haussmann's passion for the rectilinear, expressed in arid boulevards lined by serried ranks of identical buildings and uniformly trimmed trees, his love of size (monumentality, some said, for its own sake), have formed the base of all subsequent criticism of Haussmann as urbanizer. The work that he did below ground—the sewers and the uncontaminated water supply system—was and has remained praised. It is his taste, which may well have represented that of a majority of his contemporaries, that had been scorned. Haussmann's urban aesthetics were those of the classical city—broad streets leading the eye to a monument at their end, uniform buildings, open *places* adorned with statues, order bestowed by the rectilinear. These principles Haussmann unsentimentally imposed no matter what had to be demolished to make way for them. The Paris Haussmann inherited, although still a medieval city of twisting, narrow, dark, and dank streets lined with a hodgepodge of buildings, had some significant classical elements. The Bourbon kings had given Paris the place Vendôme, the place des Victoires, the place des Vosges, the place du Trône (currently place de la Républic), and the place Louis XV (currently place de la Concorde). Haussmann continued this implantation of a classical city in a medieval one, but on an enormous scale and with far less sense of grace and beauty than the Bourbons had commanded. He complained that his work was done at a time when there were no great architects working in France. This may be true. More to the point is Haussmann's own narrow concept of the city and his sense of taste. Even the emperor told his prefect he was too obsessed with the sight-lines of newly created streets, and reminded him that in London they were concerned less with the view and more with the best means of solving problems of circulation. Haussmann's response, at least in his *Mémoires*, was "Sire, the Parisians are not English. They need more."

Haussmann's ideas of city planning came from his years in Bordeaux. He had had no training in architecture or art, but in Bordeaux he had lived in a city that had been transformed in the eighteenth century. Between 1744 and 1755 the intendant, or king's deputy to the region, the marquis de Tourny, had accomplished this transformation. He ringed the city with a system of boulevards where the old walls had stood, planted formal gardens, created a new market, completed the place Royale celebrating Louis XV, built several



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

public *places*, a bourse, and a new port with symmetrical housing. Much of this work can still be seen in Bordeaux. The criticism most often made against Tourny's Bordeaux is that it is cold and austere, but if the city lacks charm it impresses with stateliness, with architectural harmony and regularity.

Haussmann closely identifed himself with Tourny, and not only in aesthetic matters. The marquis de Tourny had eventually been forced from his intendancy by the notables, especially the judicial elite, of Boreaux. But before being recalled by Louis XV, he had high-handedly compelled the notables of the city to build in a uniform style; he had attracted private capital with government investment in land clearance and street building; and he had transformed Bordeaux from a medieval into a classical city. Haussmann saw himself and his work recapitulating that of the career of Tourny. In a speech delivered on June 6, 1861, to the Senate, he declared himself the disciple of the marquis de Tourny. The parallels are striking. Haussmann is in many ways a figure from the past, and his position in the empire is remarkably like that of an eighteenth-century intendant, glorifying himself by glorifying the state and his master, which are one and the same.

Few regretted Haussmann's fall on January 5, 1870. Instead of the pension of a *grand fonctionnaire*, which he insists he was entitled to, he was given six thousand francs a year, the pension of a simple prefect. This was strictly correct but mean spirited on the part of his enemies. He entertained a few offers to advise on urban projects, most notably the transformation of Rome, but spent most of his time at Cestas, the village outside Bordeaux where he had a substantial house and old friends. He briefly reappeared in public life, in the Third Republic, as a deputy representing Corsica, and in this capacity spoke passionately for the rebuilding of the Tuileries palace, destroyed by the Commune. It is the only plea to preserve a historical building that Haussmann ever made. He never fully recovered from the fall of the empire, and he never achieved serenity in his life. Embittered and forgotten, he devoted his last years to his reputation by writing the three huge volumes of *Mémoires*.

There is no art to this autobiography, only a clear portrait of the prefect as he wanted to be remembered and judged. He was the man who transformed Paris, Whenever he recalled his days of Glory, he did so with a fierce mixture of pride at his enormous accomplishment and rancor toward his enemies: "I retain, as the fruit of strenuous effort, only the honor of having served my country well in a position that was as difficult as it was important." He forgave no man who had opposed him, and thirty years after many of these quarrels, with his opponents long in the grave, Haussmann is still justifying himself in his *Mémoires*. His career was, he reiterates countless times, "filled above all with adversity, cruel disillusionments and petty calamities." These sour recollections of accomplishment through adversity provide the emotional framework of the *Mémoires*. Haussmann blames his misfortunes on others. He is a man with little interest in self-examination and none in self-incrimination. The man he presents is capable, honest, forthright, and principled. It is this last attribute he emphasizes in his final years.

Bonapartism, after the debacle of the Second Empire, was a contemptible cause. Louis Napoleon died in exile in 1873 and his only son died in 1879. Leadership then passed to Victor Napoleon, and in the feeble attempts to resurrect Bonapartism, Haussmann assumed the role of elder statesman, which he enjoyed. He occasionally spoke on public occasions, and in 1885 began a correspondence with Victor Napoleon. Haussmann here elaborated his views on Bonapartism and in doing so created a myth for himself. "I was an imperialist from birth," he insists. "A democrat and very liberal, but no less authoritarian for that, I have always held the profound belief that in France the only practical form of Democracy is the Empire." This conviction has a pedigree, set forth in the *Mémoires*: "We have no idea just how many resources France has and how rich and powerful she could become, if she were well governed, above all if she were well administered," he has his grandfather declare. Haussmann thus imbibed the Bonapartist ideal from the cradle, and his career and work on Paris are the realization of his Bonapartist convictions. His own fall was a foreshadowing of the fall of the empire, but his work would live on. He had done great deeds, made a name for himself, a name welded to Paris. Even as cliché Haussmann is inextricably tied to the city in a way no other man is tied to any other city.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# *The Hairpin Curve at Durango*

WALTER MCDONALD

Where the road dips back on itself
downhill, I slow the rig so I won't
jackknife, or sail off into space.

This turn has killed runaway trucks
smashed on the stones below,
convertibles and fast sports cars

careening smartly out
and tumbling. Truckers I know
don't dread crashing head-on

with drivers who fall asleep
on the straightaway,
don't mind running sassy pickups

off the road, the devil
and bar ditch take them.
But icy roads that curve

and slide us helpless into air
are trouble. Dieseling downhill
I bluff oncoming traffic

to the rails, no way
I'll risk the edge
for courtesy. Climbing home,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

groaning with a load of wood
or pigs for market, I grind uphill,
no sweat, my right wheels safe

on asphalt, letting the poor guys
creeping downhill hug the centerline.
Knowing the gray sky twists

and disappears inches away
below them, I glance at their eyes
wide to all possibilities, both hands

knuckled on their wheels.
I see their tight lips yelling
at their kids, *Shut up. Shut up.*

✪ WALTER McDONALD is the Horn Professor of English at Texas Tech University. His most recent books of poems include *Night Landings*, *After the Noise of Saigon*, and *The Flying Dutchman*.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# In Defense of Poesie and Bullfighting

## Scenes from a Taurine Life

JOHN McCORMICK

May 15 in Madrid celebrates the patron of the city, San Isidro, and it is the beginning of what in Goya's time was a day or weekend of fiesta, but now for various mainly commercial reasons, it has become a three-week marathon running from May 10th to June 4th. For many Madrileños, as for me, the fiesta of San Isidro is dominated by some twenty-six bullfights *(corridas de toros)*, but of equal attraction lately was the possibility of mornings in the Prado. The morning of May 15, 1990, was a lovely one, cool but not cold, and the approach along the Paseo del Prado had been washed down and smelled of grass and spring flowers. In the queue at the entrance to the museum, the man behind me struck up a conversation to pass the time. He proved to be an Irish missionary who, after twenty-nine years in Nigeria, was in Madrid for the first time on his way to Dublin. "And what brings you here?" he asked.

I told him that I had come as often as I could over the years for the *corridas* of San Isidro, the fiesta that Goya had depicted in paint and in his delightful cartoons for tapestries in the Royal Palace. "Ah yes," he said, "Isidore. I looked him up yesterday in the register. It seems that if he existed at all, he was most probably a minor pagan god."

It struck me that in the years of Franco and even before, the notion of the patron saint of Madrid as a pagan god would have been unsettling if not heretical on the lips of a priest, but that now the idea of a pagan Isidore would unsettle no one. Isidore, or Fortuna, had made possible the steady transition of Spain from a police state to a constitutional monarchy, with only the operatic moves of a group of colonels in February 1981 to challenge the peaceful transition. Spain and especially Madrid is now open where it had been closed, candid where it had been secretive, and eager where it had been reluctant. Foreign commentators, however, tend to take contemporary Spain at face value, as a country that has shed its dubious past: priest-ridden, dirty, cruel, and barbarous, to join joyfully the three-piece-suited world of easy cash and hard consumption.

The streets of old Madrid, formerly austere, beautiful, and run-down, are host to dumpsters laden with fragments of seventeenth-century oaken partitions, plaster, and assorted litter, for Madrid is in the throes of a housing boom. New cars creep through their own smog; on cool days it seems that the entire population is covered in luxurious black leather. Mere economic analysis, the melodrama of the stock market, and apparent resemblances between Madrid and a dozen other cities dominated by banks, office buildings, air pollution, and drugs fail to discern extraordinary continuities in the social texture of Spain. At the most superficial level, I noted that, although the old woman sitting in the sun in the park outside the opera might be wearing a sweatshirt inscribed "Las Vegas" rather than the traditional black of mourning, the same sad, often beautiful face of the past belied her costume. In the subway to Las Ventas, the Madrid *plaza de toros*, not all was black leather. When hot weather came, many men removed their socks and endured the

✪ JOHN McCORMICK is professor emeritus of comparative literature at Rutgers University. His most recent book is *George Santayana: A Biography.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heat in their winter shoes. Modernity had not triumphed for the man who had to slap his wrist to make his digital watch register.

Such impressions reinforced my conviction during the *corridas* of May 1990 that to come to terms with the Spanish temperament in all its manifestations, one cannot ignore the place of *toreo* (or bullfighting; I prefer the Spanish word on the grounds that no man can "fight" a bull; the English word at once diminishes understanding). Even good Hispanists get things wrong from subscribing to the stereotype in Western society of *toreo* as a bloodthirsty throwback, at best a casual diversion of a perverted, savage place.

Simply to list the headings under which the relationship between the Spanish and *toreo* has been considered is to begin to see that *toreo* is more than a casual diversion of a benighted people. It has figured significantly in the history of the Catholic Church in Spain, in civil and criminal law, in the divisions in society by class, in the language, in all the arts, and for better or worse, in the politics, manners, and mores of generations. Cultural anthropologists—among them Julio Caro Baroja and Julian Pitt-Rivers, and the folklorist A. Alvarez de Miranda—find the cult of the bull as sacred object and as savage beast at archeological sites in many parts of the world. They note that it has endured in Spain and lies deeply embedded in the folk memory.

It is hardly necessary to give way to the mystical speculations of cultural anthropologists about ancient, sacred bull-rites in order to accept that Catholicism and *toreo* have been intimately connected for two centuries or more. The mid-eighteenth century and the development of *toreo a pie* (bullfighting on foot) created the prospect of death on the horns of a bull, a prospect that could not fail to make the comforts of Catholicism completely beguiling. For centuries previously, the lancing of bulls from horseback had been an aristocratic diversion. Now mere commoners developed first the craft, then the art of controlling a fierce animal with capes and killing it with a sword. With the appearance of the professional matador (literally "killer"), who contemplates his fate daily, genuine faith, superstition, or both led to a special reliance on the blessing and intercessions of the Church.

It must be said that Spain remains not only nominally but actually Catholic; even the men now go to church. Further, *corridas* are still celebrated on the saint's day of the village, town, or city. Frequently in the past, and continuing in outlying districts into the present, priests were expected to *torear* in the village plaza on the saint's day. In the nineteenth century, the Vatican threatened excommunication for such activity. In Andalusia, the Carthusians, Augustinians, and the Dominicans operated for profit *ganaderías* (breeding ranches) of *toros bravos* or *toros de lidia* (both mean fighting bulls; *lidiar* is another untranslatable term that roughly means "to fight a bull"). Some commentators have suggested that the sacrifice of the mass and the sacrifice of the bull derive somehow from a common ancestor.

*Toreo* has been involved in politics often, and often deplorably, as when Generalissimo Franco, with some success, tried to take over the entire profession with improved conditions and high pensions. In 1898, the year of the complete end of the Spanish empire, Juan López Valdemoro, Conde de las Navas, published *El espectáculo más nacional*, his attempt to revive Spanish pride with an impassioned, unpleasantly nationalistic examination of *toreo*. "We have slept under our laurels for too many years without looking beyond our borders. We may not be so tremendously patriotic as the English, so artistic as the Italians, so powerful as the Russians, so industrial and elegant as the French, . . . nor so peaceful as the Swiss, but let us not be ashamed to be toreros, for . . . in our national spectacle *there is plenty of iron* [*sic*] with which to cure our anaemia."

In politics, *toreo* traditionally has been associated with the Spanish Right. It was the aristocratic landowners who had the land on which to breed *toros de lidia* as an avocation as much as for profit. At the same time, the Spanish conception of chivalry, with its emphasis on personal honor and duty, was transmitted to the profession of *toreo* and remains predominant. Every first-class plaza has a royal box, one often occupied by royalty. The democratic king, Carlos, is a keen aficionado, but he takes his place among the crowd, nearer the action. The Left in Spain and elsewhere has always seen *toreo* as bread and circuses, a sop to the oppressed masses.

As for language, *toreo* has figured in a great deal of writing, both good and mediocre. In everyday speech, the Spanish are deafeningly



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loquacious but far from literary. In the place of literary cliché, the rude public in the plazas is linguistically inventive, and the tang carries over to polite speech as well. *Toreo* has spawned an entire language and sub-language, often obscene, always comic, and untranslatable. During San Isidro, a bull too small, in public estimation, was being worked on by a highly paid *torero*; entire tiers of the plaza showed displeasure by meowing en masse.

If *toreo* is not a brutal anachronism, what is it? And how can good scholars ignore its place in the scheme of things? Briefly put, *toreo* is not the savage mess that many tourists pronounce it to be, but an art form requiring study, taste, observation, and a measure of dedication and patience, like any other art, before its essence and aesthetic quality emerge. Just as people in the social sciences have been known to slight or evade painting and opera, so they tend to evade that difficult, mysterious form, *toreo,* so rarely seen at its best.

To the confirmed aficionado, at its rare best *toreo* combines the *torero's* (the word defines all who face the *toro*: the matador, the picadors, and the banderilleros) training, experience, intuition, control, craft, imagination, and spontaneity. It does not depend upon mere agility or athletic ability, but it demands immediate recognition of the possibilities of each *toro* and almost instant devising of a plan for dispatching the animal with grace and authority, according to the canons of the art and craft. For these and many other reasons, *toreo* as an art form is unique in that the *torero* cannot make errors without grievous risk; he cannot paint over a bad stroke or rewrite a paragraph. *Toreo* is not a pure art but a mixed one; it is an art of performance, like ballet, and, like opera and theater, it demands the complicity of many and varied people for success.

Virtually everyone outside Spain, Mexico, or the handful of South American countries where *toreo* is legal would deny the status of art to an activity that they see only as a cruel sport. The Spanish application to the EEC was delayed for years in part because of "bullfighting," and as recently as 1988 several members of the Council of Europe proposed a resolution that would require Spain to abolish the practice. Those gestures, deriving from low politics and high-mindedness, are fortified in the efforts of Greenpeace, Animal Rights, Save the Elephants, and related admirable and idealistic ventures. To the charge of cruelty, many Spaniards answer that the *toro* is bred to die a glorious death in the plaza. Others say yes, it is cruel, but that public cruelty reflects the cruelty of the animal world itself, adding that matadors do not abuse their children in secret, as seems to happen in humanitarian, non-cruel societies. *Toreo* is unknown in the Basque provinces of Spain, although the Basque separatists blow people up with ingenuity and regularity.

The charge of cruelty must involve one Spanish conception of tragedy, I think. I find that the faces of Spaniards everywhere are the same faces we see in the Spanish galleries of the Prado: inward-looking, never really vapid, often indeed tragic, in Unamuno's sense in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*: in what he calls the "war" between rational skepticism and the human urge to faith in immortality. The tragic sense of life accommodates cruelty, just as troops in combat accommodate, in some manner, the deaths of comrades. True, the inept, splashy killings of bulls that one sees too often are cruel, but for reasons not immediately apparent to most spectators. Such cruelty results from unscrupulous managers who pick up a raw, talented boy and arrange for him to take on bulls he cannot cope with for lack of full training and experience. Other cruelties result from impresarios and veterinarians who permit the animals' horns to be sawed and filed, thus throwing off their timing; from *ganaderos* who sell bulls that formerly they would have rejected after testing; and venal critics who take bribes to praise indifferent or abysmal performances.

*Toreo* distinctly is not sport, not a contest between man and animal. The bull must die, in public, even if it has wounded or killed the matador opposing it or any other *torero* in the ring. The outcome of each segment of the *corrida* is known in advance, and the *torero's* every motion, if he is any good, contributes in its set order to the bull's death. No one bets on *corridas*, nor do Spanish children wear *toreros'* costumes casually, as our children go about in baseball caps and quarterbacks' jerseys. *Toreo* is profound as sport does not pretend to be, serious in a way that a Monty Pythonized culture is unprepared for. Further, *toreo* must be considered as art in that a vivid and necessary relationship exists be-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tween what occurs in the ring and an informed, independent body of criticism.

The Civil War of 1936–39 of course devastated Spain in every aspect, not least *toreo*. Herds were slaughtered for meat and required years after the war to be reconstituted in one form or another. Franco's rule meant anti-intellectualism triumphant; the universities, the arts in general and *toreo* in particular, the pure and genuine thing, were ignored, corrupted, or both. When *corridas* were resumed on an organized basis, underage animals with shaved horns were tolerated, and too many critics went along with the sham. Reforms began in the mid-1960s; a new breed of critic refused bribes from *toreros'* managers, and by the mid-1970s conditions were much healthier than they had been for thirty years or more. Franco's death in November 1975 and the emergence of democratic forms coincided with new respect and enforcement of the official regulations governing every aspect of *toreo*.

The corruption of the past left a rotten smell, and the plazas in the early 1970s often were half-empty. Spanish, European, and American journalists informed the world that bullfighting was dead or dying and that soccer had taken its place. Their analysis proved wrong and their *Schadenfreude* joyless. With Spain's entry into the EEC and subsequent stability, a formerly small, depressed middle class became large, spirited, and prosperous. Dominated by young people with pesetas to spare, a new public crowded into the *plazas de toros* as never before. No two people agree about the reasons for the change in attitude on the part of an entire new generation, but the most thoughtful Madrileños cite memories of an agricultural nation fast turning suburban, and efforts to remain somehow in touch with vivid realities that now may be found only in the bull ring. For whatever reason, *toreo* has become fashionable; books on the subject abound as never before, and a new, ignorant public has available in the press a learned and intelligent body of criticism.

That is not to imply that all is well with Spain or with *toreo*. Inflation has affected the country on every side. *Toreo* has undergone an artistic inflation in addition to the economic variety: almost 40,000,000 tickets to 13,616 *corridas* were sold in 1989. Among the leading nine matadors, payment for each *corrida* ranged from two to five million pesetas (one million pesetas equals about ten thousand dollars); prices for bulls paid to *ganaderos* are proportionately high. The ordinary spectator of the past, the working class and the poor, who were among the most faithful and knowledgeable of aficionados, cannot afford the new ticket prices. The Spanish say that the best places go to company executives and their guests, who know little and care less about *toreo*, but to whom it matters to be seen in the plaza. More seriously, the best Spanish *toros* are now being sold to the French, who pay even more than the Spanish to see a *corrida*, while the breeders pass off inferior animals in Spanish plazas. These amount to fundamental changes that endanger the integrity of *toreo*; but, like opera or theater, *toreo* goes from crisis to crisis and yet somehow contrives to survive. Its best hope now lies in the few, newly excellent newspapers that print exacting reports, and in the abundance of periodicals and books on the subject now available.

Any slight authority for the foregoing derives from a remote past. Early in the winter of 1961, I found myself in the smaller of the two bull rings of Mexico City, El Toreo, chatting with two established Mexican matadors, while resting on the *estribo* (foot rail) of the plaza after a stint of training under the hot winter sun. My daily function was mainly to run a pair of horns mounted on a billet of wood, in order to simulate the charge of a fighting bull for the professionals, while observing and trying to learn from them the mental and physical techniques of the art and spectacle of *toreo*. When the professionals had had enough, I would go to work with my own cape, muleta, and sword under the critical eye of Mario Sevilla, a retired Mexican matador, before the charge of an imaginary bull, or horns run by other aspiring *toreros*. At age forty-three, as I then was, I had no illusions about becoming anything more than conversant with the art of *toreo*. My first motive was to enter that enclosed ambiance in order to write a book in English that would put straight what I thought were misapprehensions fostered by Ernest Hemingway in his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, most fully in *Death in the Afternoon*, and in his various taurine journalism. In 1961, *Death in the Afternoon* had not been translated into Span-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ish, and so I asked the matadors, never as a group noted for literacy, if they knew Hemingway's book, which I translated literally as "Muerte en la tarde." They both laughed, and Manolo said, "Look here, a man doesn't go into the ring to die. We go to the bulls to live."

His answer lent authority to my own reflections, not only about *toreo,* but also about Spanish history and popular culture. Increasingly as the years passed, *torero* in its many aspects came to explain and to illuminate various qualities of Spanish life that many otherwise informed and fair-minded people neglect as repulsive and barbarous. Hemingway is partly to blame. His emphasis on gorings, blood, guts, and death as inevitable and tragic completely violates the matadors' belief that a *torero* who is caught by the bull is not a hero but inept; he has failed to know his bull and failed to observe the canons of his art, which would have provided the necessary recourse to avoid disaster. Overtones of tragedy are present in the finest *corridas,* but not for Hemingway's reasons.

Another of Hemingway's errors, from the point of view of the men in the ring, was to glorify the *torero* at the expense of the *toro.* The *toreros* say, "Sin toros, no hay toreros." (*Toreo* is impossible without the *toro.*) Good criticism of a *corrida* inevitably begins with comment on the bulls, their provenance, age, weight, horns, and their general condition. Hemingway had to have known all that, but writing for a mass audience, he deleted such matters in the main, just as he invented a great deal of false melodrama in the travesty written for *Life* magazine and published as *The Dangerous Summer.* It is possible that a Spanish critic's opinion of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*—"Oyó campanas, pero no supo de donde" (He heard bells, but he didn't know where from)—was conditioned by that critic's opinion of Hemingway on *toreo.* Increasingly as the years passed, *toreo* in its many aspects came to explain and to illuminate matters that had seemed hidden and mysterious in Hispanic attitudes.

I had seen my first *corrida* in 1936, in Maracay, Venezuela, when briefly I had been a seaman in a tanker bound for Spain. Both the bulls and the only memorable *torero* on that occasion were Mexican. Luis Castro, "El Soldado," stayed in the mind for his nonchalance, an unhurried mastery, which I lacked the knowledge to analyze, and for his unsmiling and purposeful failure to play up to the spectators: no hotdoggery. He behaved in the plaza just as the haughty William Faulkner would have behaved had he been a *torero.* Between the necessity to earn my living and service in World War II, no further *corridas* were possible for me until long after the war; the memory of Luis Castro faded but did not disappear. Meanwhile, my collection of books on *toreo* accumulated, and with it impatience at the decayed romanticism and the inflated prose of much of the writing on the subject in English and Spanish.

An invitation to teach in the national university in Mexico City made possible a concentrated dose of both Mexican and Spanish *toreo,* and a light schedule created time and opportunity for more than a spectator's participation. A Bolivian painter with whom I attended *corridas* remarked that I was "really interested." I said that I had wanted for a long time to write about *toreo,* but that I could never know enough to write the book I believed the world to be crying out for. The result was an introduction to Mario Sevilla. We agreed to write that book, but Mario insisted that, if I were serious about it, I had myself to learn the fundamentals. "Fine," I said. "Teach me."

The next fourteen months were exhilarating, exhausting, and more informative than I had believed possible. My seminar in literary criticism at the university took place in the late afternoons three days a week. On five or six days a week, I would rise at 5:30 A.M., drive to Mario's by six, roust him out of bed, and make for Chapultepec Park, where among the early walkers and practitioners of yoga I could learn the rudiments of the cape and the muleta in the comparative privacy of that urban forest. Mario, then in his fifties and pudgy, would lecture, reminisce, and answer my questions, while reprimanding me for a tendency to *codear,* or tuck in my elbows: dangerous, for safety lies in keeping the bull, still imaginary, at arm's length. "Extend your arms and *torear* as though you had no body," he'd say, quoting the great matador, Domingo Ortega; or "Muñeca, muñeca," (wrist) impressing on me the importance of aligning passes with the muleta by bringing the *toro* around with both the arm and a full turn of the wrist.

An early lesson in Chapultepec came not from Mario but from an adolescent passerby.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was accustomed to seeing youngsters like himself passing imaginary bulls, but a man of my age and bearing was not just novel but unthinkable. "Who is this señor?" he asked Mario. "Ask the señor," Mario said. "He speaks Castilian." When the boy asked my name, I suppressed an impulse to tell him to go climb a tree, but told him my name. "What kind of name is that?"

"It's Irish."

The boy considered that, as I continued trying to perfect a left-handed pass, the *natural*, and still look natural. Finally he asked, "What is your mother's name?"

"Her name was Beauchemin."

"Una francesa?"

"Si."

He smiled with relief. A French mother explained how a gringo could have the *sangre*, the necessary Mediterranean blood, to become as involved in *toreo* as I obviously was. I was to meet similar incomprehension repeatedly over the years. Many Spaniards whom I encounter in the plazas do not want to believe that any foreigner, much less an American, might understand their special art and speak its language. Spanish nationalism (according to which all pickpockets in Madrid are South American) means that simply to be born in Spain endows one with exhaustive knowledge of *toreo*. A distinguished and polished Spanish novelist told me that he could not see how it would be possible to write in English about *toreo*.

On weekends later in my instructional year, Mario, young Mario, a fourteen-year-old whom his father planned to succeed him, and one or two other young Mexicans would drive far out in the provinces of Morelia or Guadalajara to the ranches where *toros bravos* were reared; those nearer the city were besieged by young men looking for practice. In the breeders' *tientas* (testings), we might get a chance to work with the female calves that were being scrutinized to determine their qualities as breeding stock for the plazas. Testing meant that the animal would be released into a small plaza where the effort of all concerned—the breeder, his mounted *vaquero* acting as picador, and the *toreros* on foot—was to determine the animal's possibilities. Ideally the manner in which it charged the horse and the capes would indicate *casta*, *codicia*, or whether the animal was *noble*, to name only some of the untranslatable and desirable traits the breeder hoped for. (*Casta* is the highest term of praise for the *toro bravo*. *Codicia* means "greed"; it applies to the *toro* that charges and re-charges greedily. *Noble*, not a cognate, defines the animal that charges straight to the cape without tossing its horns en route; it is the easiest animal to *torear*.)

These engagements involved endless planning, but they often ended in a long drive only to learn that the *tienta* wouldn't take place for another month, or had occurred the week before. When things went well, those trips were invaluable to me, no matter how flyblown the meat and warm the beer pressed upon us by the *ganadero*, who often in Mexico led a chancy existence high up an arid mountain. Practice on a living animal at once displayed how different a fast calf swerving into the body is from an imaginary five-year-old *toro*, how urgently instinctive reactions got in the way of all I had learned from Mario, and how essential were years of experience in observing and discriminating among the various strains of *toro bravo*. The contrast between my mornings and weekends to my late afternoon academic work was complete and fascinating. My university hosts were startled, and some disapproved of my going so fully native, although they were too polite to say so.

June 1962 approached, and in July I would have to leave Mexico and the bulls to return to life on the eastern seaboard of the United States. My new friends in the world of the bulls, led by Mario, could not believe that I was serious. I had worked very hard and could go on working toward the day when I might even make big pesos as "El norteamericano" in the plazas along the Texas border. I assured them that I had a profession, a family to support, and duties to my university and to my students. There was also the little matter of my age, but Mario reminded me that *toreros* had gone on into their fifties and sixties with distinction, and hadn't the great Pedro Romero killed bulls in public at the age of eighty? Surely by now I realized that *toreo* was not a sport depending on agility? It was art, not sport. I indeed knew that, for I had always been enthusiastic but barely average at baseball and other sports.

Finally convinced, Mario and the others set up an "Extraordinario Novillada de Gala" for June 10 in the *plaza de toros* "La Piedad," in the state of Michoacan, with *novillos* (three-year-old bulls; in a *corrida de toros*, the bulls



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

must be four or more years old) of Albarrada, a ranch unknown to me and to most people, somewhere up in the mountains. Mario insisted, with my complicity, that if only for purposes of our book, I must undergo the experience of killing a bull or bulls in public in *traje de luces* (suit of lights). He also hoped to convince me to renounce university teaching and embark on a belated career in *toreo*, a completely unreal hope.

In the weeks before my presentation in public, I trained with special intensity, had dreams of tramplings and gorings, and found a tailor who would rent me a tobacco and silver suit of lights for the great day. The suit didn't fit (*toreros* tend to be small men and I am fairly tall), and it had an ominous repair on the left inner thigh. On the morning of June ninth, we set out on the long drive to Michoacan, the Mexicans talking non-stop as always, while I drove, wondering exactly what I had got myself into. What if the rancher was unloading on us a *corrida* of unsalable four- or five-year-old *toros de verdad*? We endured several hours on the road, then stopped for some food in a pueblo from which Mario could telephone to check whether the Albarrada bulls in fact were already at La Piedad, calming down in the corrals from their transport by truck. After an endless absence, Mario came back to our table to report that the truck transporting our four *novillos* had overturned on a mountain road and the *corrida* would have to be suspended. We drove back to Mexico City in a glum silence. We never did learn the fate of the Albarradas. It was all very Mexican.

It was also very Mexican that the week before I was to leave for good, Mario and the others bought two *novillos* for me to *torear* in a small private ring near Mexico City belonging to a friend. I survived, disgracing neither Mario nor myself, and was eternally grateful for an extraordinary year among extraordinary people. When it was time to drive away, a dozen of them turned up with farewell presents they could not afford. Even the hangers-on, some of whom had stolen my best ties in a party at mid-year, had tears in their eyes, possibly crocodile tears, that I could really, in truth, leave the world of the bulls, the only world that for them had any reality. In due time, and after a great deal of observation in Spanish plazas, a book appeared in the U.S. and in Britain, written in my English, since Mario knew only Spanish. That in turn led to further critical pieces on *toreo* and further trips to Spain when the university calendar permitted.

Mexico had been my secondary school and Spain my university in *toreo*. Thirty years on, some conclusions may be possible, if conclusions are ever possible. *Toreo*, no matter where it is practiced, remains Spanish in origin and essence, just as Russian opera sung in New York remains Russian. The essence of *toreo* penetrates Spanish behavior in curious and interesting ways. It unfolds on sand in heat or cold, sometimes in wind and rain, and always in bull-filth and blood; nevertheless it requires that the matador maintain his posture and his dignity while following an unvarying procedure. That procedure is determined by the nature of the *toro* and by the history of the matador's craft. He becomes singular, set apart from the run of humanity the moment he steps into the arena. Something of that sense of self, involving honor and *oficio*, a sense of self-imposed duty, is present in virtually every Spaniard I have encountered. He is self-centered, an anarchist in his soul, yet courteous and hospitable: "Mi casa es su casa," (My house is your house) he tells you, and he means it, but underlying his courtesy is not kindness in our sense but abstract honor and duty. Such complex qualities have kept Spain intact in catastrophic times.

My interpretation of Spain thus mitigated any tendency to idealize *toreo* when I went beyond Spanish borders. I found the tendency present in myself, for "bullfighting" makes many people nervous, combative, and eager to reform me. They haven't a chance. *Toreo* has given me a view of reality that I find invaluable. In the presence of a charging *toro bravo*, the matador must *aguantar* (endure, suffer) the charge while maintaining his composure. So daily life may charge, and so one must *aguantar* the charge without fleeing in panic. In brief, *toreo* puts things, all things, from trivial to apocalyptic, in their proper perspective. For that I can only be thankful, while remaining unreformed, unrepentant.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# How Good Are Community Colleges?

ALLEN SALZMAN

Although more young people in the United States attend college than in any other nation in the world, it is a little-known fact that close to half of these students attend community colleges. For most Americans, there is a community college just a short distance from home. Several foreign countries are working to graft the American model of the community college onto their own educational systems.

Community colleges offer degrees of "associate" to students who have completed courses of study that correspond to the freshman and sophomore years of college. Credits earned from community colleges transfer to four-year schools, so that a student may transfer as a junior. Community colleges also offer "vocational" degrees and certificates for students who desire local employment. They offer, for personal interest, non-credit courses that do not transfer.

The community college has evolved from the junior college, a creation usually credited to President William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago. In 1900, Harper envisaged the junior college as preparation for the last two years of university study. Harper's idea was to expand the public high schools to include the numerous poor and faltering independent, small, liberal arts and denominational colleges in the Midwest. Harper admired the high schools of his day for their success in training students to take their place in an increasingly mechanized industrial work force and technologized agrarian society. He recommended that the high schools operate for six years, bringing a student up to his junior year in college. Harper thought the teachers in public high schools were better instructors than many of those in the small colleges. In large cities the high schools had better libraries, laboratory equipment, and popular support. Harper also believed that keeping the student home a few more years to mature before going out into the world would have a beneficial effect upon his moral life.

Harper envisioned a federation of small colleges, academies, and junior colleges that would be associated closely with one another and with the universities. His federation would comprise an American system of education similar to the European lycée or Gymnasium. His idea was to keep the university as free as possible for original scholarship by temporarily confining to subordinate institutions those who needed instruction in the more rudimentary areas of higher education. He felt that the university should be preserved for the highest intellectual activities and that the first two years should be preparatory. The teaching of those basic preparatory courses was best left to this separate institution. The original inspiration for the community college, therefore, came from the desire to create a strong propaedeutic closely coordinated with the universities.

But, as the century progressed, other forces combined with the movement inspired by Harper's ideas to create a hybrid institution that gradually separated from the universities. For example, the development of the evening high school, the YMCA, the Chautauqua movement, and other religiously affiliated reading or study groups that were of interest primarily to adults who were not necessarily going to transfer to a university created a demand for a special type of institution. Still another demand was for a work force that could become better trained because it was

✪ ALLEN SALZMAN teaches in the humanities and social sciences departments at Triton Community College in River Grove, Illinois.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more literate and numerate. This goal was fostered by the federal government's encouragement of locally available post-secondary practical educational training at low cost.

To answer these demands, the forerunners of modern community colleges started to appear in fairly large numbers in the 1920s. These variations of Harper's junior college were really extensions of the high schools and closely modeled on them. The popularity of the free public high school system and the belief that it furthered democracy had prepared taxpayers for the levy and expenditure of tax revenues to support a new kind of public institution. These new schools often did not at first have buildings of their own. They were forced to conduct classes whenever available buildings were vacant. The teachers were frequently former high school teachers.

Historians concur that by the 1940s, the community college had evolved into an institution with two purposes: it offered academic courses as preparation for the young people in a particular locality who planned to attend a university and vocational training for those who did not. Courses were offered on the basis of what was needed for university entry, what was demanded by local employers, or what was thought by administrators to be of local interest. Today the community college maintains this same basic two-part structure of academic preparation for transfer and vocational training. However, the activities engaged in by community colleges have multiplied beyond these tasks, as has the number of community colleges.

## II

In President Harper's day, the late 1890s, to study for a college degree was an unusual way for the ordinary young person to prepare for a career. A high school diploma was enough. A university graduate who came from the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder was rare. Today, however, anyone who wants to can attend some kind of college. With the expansion of post-secondary education after World War II—much of it, truth to tell, not very distinguished—a college degree now lies within the grasp of just about everyone. There is general agreement that the community college ranks among the lower forms of higher education.

However, assessment of the community college is difficult, because the picture is very heterogeneous. To a greater or lesser extent, each institution differs from the others in its internal organizational structure, in its physical facilities, in what subjects are emphasized, in the intellectual quality of its teachers, in the way its financial resources are acquired and allocated, and in how sources of revenue from tuition receipts are balanced with appropriations from state and local taxing bodies. The abilities and aspirations of the students vary—from state to state, from school to school, sometimes even from semester to semester within each school. There is no one typical community college.

Yet all community colleges are generally acknowledged to be part of the family of universities. To obtain a post as a full-time teacher, for example, one usually must have attained a degree beyond the baccalaureate. Community college calendars, catalogs, course syllabi, advertising brochures, "charter documents," the certification granted by agencies of accreditation, and publications of all kinds affirm that community colleges permit no deviation from the recognized standards of curriculum and grading at the public and private universities to which students may transfer. The community colleges partake of the same ethos and attempt to look out upon the world in the same way as the universities. Their attitudes about what education is for are also the same—or at least they are supposed to be the same.

## III

Because of their variable quality, I suspect that the most impartial judge would find that "democracy's colleges," as community colleges are sometimes called, in many ways reflect the best and the worst tendencies of United States higher education at the introductory level. If they are not the ideal complement to the universities, most of them are usually adequate, and better than nothing. Yet they have been often subjected to stringent criticism.

For example, there exists a widespread belief within the universities that the community college is a place where teachers grade more leniently, so that students can transfer to university with stronger grade point averages



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than if they had just gone straight to the university from high school. Detractors of community colleges point to the poor showing made by students who transfer to university. When community college students fail or withdraw from baccalaureate degree programs, as they do in higher proportion than do other segments of the university student population, the comment is often heard that community college students, having received gentler treatment, predictably fail once they transfer to the better, or higher-level, schools.

This perception of more lenient grading in the community college may in fact be grounded in reality. The desire to keep enrollments at levels high enough to justify continuing subsidies from sources of revenue that are fixed by enrollment has been alleged as one justification for slackened pressure. The social views of some of the teachers make up another reason. One community college teacher once said to me, "We must keep some room in our teaching for a little compassion. These kids have been beaten up by the system all their lives." Most community college teachers are not "tenured radicals," but many do not believe that university standards—or even any standards—should apply to "disadvantaged" students from "poor" secondary schools.

But the failure of students who transfer to complete undergraduate degrees in the same proportions as "native" university students may not be owing to supposedly higher standards in the universities that community college teachers balk at meeting. Interestingly, one complaint of many students who "reverse transfer"—that is, transfer to the community college from the university to shore up their weak grade point averages with what they assume will be easily acquired high grades—is that, to their dismay, the courses in the community college often can be just as hard or harder. If the standards in community colleges are low, standards in some universities in the past two decades have lowered to close the gap between the two types of institutions. A study that could assess the coefficient of relative degrees of "slippage" in grading standards between the community colleges and the universities would make interesting reading.

The proportion of devoted, highly competent teachers in universities probably equals the proportion of such teachers in the community colleges. Put another way, no shortage of incompetent teachers who reward inadequate performances ever will be reported at either community or four-year colleges. Undoubtedly, well-intentioned social progressives and easy graders trying to hold up enrollments out of self-interest exist at both types of institution as well.

Statistics about transfer students are not abundant, but another reason for the failure of community college students to complete the baccalaureate may be inferred from what figures there are. Community college students seem to follow different, often more circuitous, pathways through the system of post-secondary education than traditional college students follow. A community college student may not complete the degree within four or five years after finishing high school, but eventually, making a kind of uneven progress that makes longitudinal tracking nearly impossible, he may indeed finish. Then again, he may not desire to: for many students who transfer from community colleges, completing a baccalaureate degree is not their dream; they were never classified in their high schools as "college bound." They try to acquire just enough education to improve their business skills or to satisfy their curiosity about a subject. Thus, they naturally care less about achieving a high grade, or even a passing grade. Completing an actual degree is of secondary importance to them alongside other commitments.

One prominent misperception is that community colleges are mostly, or exclusively, remedial institutions designed to bring students who are deficient in some way up to a level where they can survive in a university classroom. As in the case of more lenient grading, this misperception also has some basis in fact.

Virtually every community college in the United States engages in some kind of remedial education. For many community colleges, remedial programs constitute the largest share of the course offerings. In the suburban community college where I teach, eight out of ten new students are placed in remedial courses in writing and mathematics. In inner-city community colleges, the proportion of newly enrolled students needing deficiencies remedied is even higher.

Even sympathetic observers of the nation's community colleges are concerned that, with



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so much concentration upon "compensatory education," the intellectual level will diminish even further, because the teachers will be doing primarily what is known as "developmental" teaching. The teachers will lose their sensitivity to the highest standards. The community colleges will become so benumbed that they will lose sight of any claim they have to membership in the university family; and fewer students who transfer will succeed.

The charge that teaching remedial courses reduces the intellectual acumen of the teaching staff is debatable. Remedial education does, however, appear to lower the demands placed on students in the liberal arts and sciences. For example, in my school, a student enrolled in a remedial writing course is neither segregated nor restricted; even if he fails to pass the remedial course repeatedly, he may enroll each semester in regular college courses for academic credit, in addition to repeating the remedial course for no credit, in order to attend class for the number of hours per week required for the status of a full-time student. When most of the students in an introductory sociology class, for example, cannot write an acceptable essay, because they are just beginning to learn how to do so in a remedial class, the teacher tends to assess their work by a less demanding standard than an essay.

Today all but a few of the most distinguished universities engage in remedial education of some sort. In fact, the universities began offering courses in basic reading, writing, and computational skills, and the community colleges took it over. The biggest problem with remedial education, both in the universities and in the community colleges, is that it tends to become a world unto itself, partially closed off from the rest of the college. Often, passing a remedial course only proves that one can pass a remedial course—nothing more. Many students who pass on into regular college-level courses in English or mathematics still cannot keep up, because the real problem, a general lack of preparation for college, finally remains unaddressed.

But in the community colleges, when an overwhelming percentage of the student body is classified as "remedial," there is indirect pressure put on the teachers to go easy on everyone. For years I have been urged to put away my lecture notes, teach simpler concepts, use smaller words, and make greater use of overhead projectors and other "audio-visual aids" and "alternative modes" of teaching. During review for reappointment and promotion, deans at community colleges assess a teacher's use of these "aids" and "modes." They think that the students cannot learn from a direct challenge to the intellect. Those who teach first- and second-year students in the universities, which have fewer remedial students passing into the general student population, feel this pressure a good deal less.

One of the wonderful things about the United States that outsiders often notice is that it is the country of the second chance. Unlike Europe or Japan, where a poor mark on one unrepeatable test in the lower grades might doom a student to a flat, unremunerative career, the tradition in our system of education has been flexible enough to allow students a fresh start even after failure. The case for remedial education has this tradition as its premise, but it appears not to have lived up to expectations, at least in the community colleges.

## IV

Community colleges, to all reports, do well in "vocational" teaching. They provide courses of study leading to certificates in electronics, data processing, the so-called para professions (paralegal and paramedical workers), automotive mechanics, machine lathe technology, and so forth, which can be put to immediate use in finding local employment. Community colleges traditionally have been sensitive to the needs of local industry for a trained labor force. "Vocational" education has been part of the fare at the community college since the beginning. Legislators, sometimes unthinkingly, turn to vocational education as a quick solution to unemployment in a district—and, not surprisingly, community colleges have been well-supplied with funds by state and federal government for "vocational" education throughout most of their history.

Most community colleges are seldom, if ever, designated by their charters to be exclusively "vocational" schools; they are a part of the entire higher educational system of the state, and it is intended that their students should be able to transfer to higher institu-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions. For this reason, they provide "general" education in the liberal arts and sciences. However, they increasingly emphasize their vocational course offerings, because appropriations, to an inordinate degree, go for practical studies.

The "vocational" emphasis of the community colleges intensified with the era of the Great Society, which preached equality while trying to enable a young person to ascend into the lower middle class. "Open admissions" introduced a way, so it was thought, to attain a marketable skill and a little "culture" along the way.

By the mid-1960s, community colleges were being established at the rate of one a week. By 1982, they enrolled between 45 and 55 percent of all black, hispanic, Asian, and American Indian students in higher education. Many researchers claim that these percentages will rise higher still. Forty-seven percent of all "poorer" students in post-secondary education—that is, those in the "lowest quartile of socio-economic status"—enrolled in community colleges in 1980.

This is not quite the great stride forward for progress that it appears to be. For one thing, poor blacks and other members of the poor but favored minorities do not need to go to community colleges if they wish to have higher education. Many colleges and universities have scholarships and grants earmarked for them. Approximately half of the minority students were in four-year colleges and universities; and the fraction of minorities in community colleges corresponded approximately to the percentages that the student population of the community colleges made up of the total population who receive higher education. That is to say, community colleges are not doing for blacks, hispanics, and the others what the propagandists of the Great Society hoped for and claimed: minorities have not flocked to the community colleges; a disappointingly small percentage of minorities who do enroll begin "vocational" programs, and only a fraction of them complete their programs.

This is not to say, however, that "vocational" programs are not successful in other unanticipated ways. The "vocational" programs of the community colleges unquestionably make vital contributions in the localities they serve, and they are popular. The Great Society notion—that, although they might settle for a "vocational" certificate, everyone really aspires to attain the four-year baccalaureate degree—has not been shown to be correct. Nor has conclusive evidence been offered to prove that "vocational" education functions as an educational holding tank for the lower classes, which "contains" them, "cools" their frustrated ambitions, and redirects them into "vocational" careers once the institution has diverted them away from the baccalaureate degree.

Many young persons are rooted in their locality and do not care to have much to do with the wider world. It is not that they are poor performers; they regard college as a privilege that is not part of their birthright. They are reluctant to apply to the university, even in the face of the heavy marketing pressure urging them to do so. College is just not for them. Such students will enroll in programs or courses in the community college that will enable them to find work in their own locality. Many of them are what used to be called "hand-minded" boys and girls. Such persons take simple pleasure from constructing and repairing things. They enroll in "vocational" education programs to improve their chances of finding employment in their locality. A new student at my own school whom I spoke with in the registration line recently expressed the point perfectly: "I can take this course [in automobile brake repair] and work in my brother's garage on weekends. Make a few extra bucks."

## V

What is it like to be a student in a community college? Students do not think of a community college in exactly the same way that they think of a regular college. Most of the students regard it as a pale reflection of a college. For one thing, it is too familiar. The community college district is made up from the neighborhoods and towns where students grew up and does not offer them a place of contemplative retreat from the everyday routines of those neighborhoods. In particular, it does not distance itself from the high schools. One's fellow students are usually the same ones one knew at high school. In some cases, the textbooks, lectures, assignments, and grading standards are of a high school level of difficulty, and the classes may be run like high



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

school classes—complete with seating charts and bells to signal the beginning and ending of classes. Not surprisingly, a student's loyalties will remain tied to the high school he attended in the district, rarely to the community college.

The attitude students hold for the community college roughly approximates the attitudes they hold for the local supermarket or the K mart: it exists to supply a certain product cheaply and efficiently. It has no other hold on their affections. "Product loyalty" may exist, but it exists as the result of advertising, and then it is loyalty confined to that department which teaches a particular "vocational" subject—the dental technology department, for example—not loyalty to the college.

Proof of this lies in the fact that community college students do not want to spend a great deal of time at the community college. They want to come for their classes and leave immediately, usually for the jobs they hold away from the campus. For purposes of advertising, everything from the course schedules to the blueprints for the parking lots are planned around this fact. Most community colleges are commuter schools. There are clubs and organizations, but they do not generate a great deal of interest, even among the full-time students who attend during the day. Significantly, a concert, play, or other cultural event at the school must be marketed to some special audience in the community, such as the senior citizens. Students do not stay around for such things.

Most community colleges have a bookstore that sells required textbooks, notebooks, and other supplies. Nowhere have I heard of a bookstore in a community college becoming a hub of intellectual activity for the students.

Many community college libraries have holdings in "non-vocational" subjects that are equal to or only slightly smaller than those of libraries at four-year colleges of equivalent student populations. This is to their credit, because they do not have juniors and seniors. But libraries do not become centers of intellectual activity either. Like the bookstores, students come for a specific book and leave when they have checked it out. But, even if they wanted to spend time there, libraries at most community colleges have limited evening and weekend hours.

Every teacher in the community college can point to students who performed in class in a superior way and with whom he has continued to be acquainted. My impression is that most students have little interest in intellectual relationships with the teachers. Students behave toward a teacher the same way they would toward an exhibitor of some new device at a home products convention. The teacher is a face giving information that will be converted at the time of the final examination into a grade. Beyond that there is nothing special about him or what he knows, and nothing like a deep bond that can form between the student and the teacher. Teachers who come to the community college hoping to find an atmosphere at least partially conducive to the scholarly life they cherished in graduate school have a rude awakening.

Despite its uncollegiate atmosphere, surveys that attempt to measure students' satisfaction at community colleges consistently show that they enthusiastically endorse the institution and the way they are being taught. The students respect knowledge, which they are vaguely aware is a good thing, but they are not sure that the university is for them. We will save all that for later, they seem to say, but for now, we are in the community college because we just want the basics, the bare bones, so to speak, and no nonsense. This attitude does not reject anything about the universities and should not necessarily be construed as super-pragmatic. The community college plays a purely instrumental role for them. It offers students an opportunity to test their wings safely and gain self-confidence at low cost. Perhaps its utilitarian quality corresponds to something they need at this time in their lives. They recognize that they are beginners and that they want to make their beginning tentatively, without the separation from home and without entering the university culture and student life just yet. The school serves them as a means to an end—perhaps, who knows, one day to the higher end of transferring to a full-time university.

Students come to the community college despite not having been steered in that direction by parents and teachers. Many, in my view, are heroic. Together with their teachers, they struggle to surmount obstacles that their counterparts, who were groomed to attend the universities and colleges from an early age, seldom face. The accessibility of community colleges is a triumph of the pluralism of American higher education that ought to be acknowledged.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# *Art and Worship*

BRUCE BAWER

*But Bruce, why can't you worship art?*
—H.Z.

However it may help us to transcend
or comprehend this vast, impermanent
realm where we commingle and contend,
furnishing us, as it were, with wings,
art is a means of worship, not an end,
the way we formulate, share, and present
to the far-off and unfathomed firmament
the yearnings of our souls toward higher things.

If a sculpture, story, symphony,
or some plain strain played on a violin
seems to articulate a verity
resoundingly, it is because it springs
out of a kindred sensibility,
soaring above the universal din
to remind us all that we are kin
with anyone whom song inspires to sing.

And yet there is an all-surpassing thrill
toward which the highest art can only tend,
as circumstance, facility, and will,
and all divine endowment will allow;



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the more immaculately to distill,
with every small degree it may ascend,
that which is eternally beyond,
and which we humbly ponder and avow.

To glorify a man, or venerate
his works, is therefore racial vanity;
revering art, we falsely elevate
ourselves, and fail to see that, here below
the height, our art is to articulate
that which we witness only partially,
finding forms for what we know must be,
yet can't be understood by what we know.

✪ BRUCE BAWER's first collection of poems, *Coast to Coast*, is forthcoming from Story Line Press.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Books

## Conversations with Samuel Beckett

JAY A. LEVY

"This is like waiting for Godot," my friend said to me as we patiently waited at the Hartford airport for the arrival of my date for the big spring weekend.

With each hour that passed, her plane continued to be delayed. That comment, in 1959, led to my studies of Samuel Beckett and his famous play.

At Wesleyan University, I was a junior premedical student pursuing a dual major in French and biology. I had dedicated a great deal of time to studying the theater of the absurd as reflected by Camus, Sartre, Genêt, and Cocteau. Reading *Waiting for Godot* by Beckett, which was published only seven years earlier, initiated my longtime interest in this Irish playwright who was writing in Paris. It led to my senior thesis, "*Waiting for Godot*, Waiting for God?" From today's perspective, the title seems very simplistic. At the time, however, relatively little had been written about Beckett's play, and the idea that Godot stood for God, while suggested, was not well substantiated. Beckett make no allusion to it. A careful look through anthologies of the Bible and the Bible itself revealed what appeared to be direct analogies to biblical events in the play. In my opinion, the hypothesis of Godot as God was a plausible interpretation of this literary piece.

When I received Fulbright and French government fellowships to conduct biological research in Paris in 1960–61, my French professor at Wesleyan, Alex Szogyi, encouraged me to find Professor Mayou, head of French Studies at the Sorbonne, to show him my thesis. "Why not let him read your thoughts on Beckett?" he insisted. I waited eight months to do so. I suppose, reflecting on my stay in Paris, that a certain amount of timidity (not generally attributed to me) prevented me from contacting Professor Mayou sooner. Having received at least two letters from Professor Szogyi encouraging me, I finally telephoned Professor Mayou, who cordially received the call and asked that I leave my paper at his office. I waited several weeks to hear from him. Then one day I received a note at my hotel, Le Grand, on rue Dauphine, inviting me for drinks at his home. Our meeting, on a Thursday evening, April 18, 1961, was very pleasant and held in a typical French salon in the apartment. A canapé dominated the room where we sat and talked for almost an hour. He told me he enjoyed the paper and encouraged me to deliver it personally to Mr. Beckett at his apartment on boulevard St-Jacques. In fact, he said he had called Beckett to tell him that I might come.

Quite excited, I took the metro the next afternoon to an apartment building at 57 boulevard St-Jacques. As I was putting the manuscript into the mailbox in the lobby, Beckett arrived. I recognized him from a photograph I had seen in a book. Somewhat taken aback, I said to him in my best French that I had been sent by Professor Mayou, whom I assumed had already spoken with him. Mr. Beckett was extremely nice, and put me at ease despite his towering presence (I felt quite small at five foot seven inches next to his height of more than six feet). Beckett quickly mentioned that neither of us had to speak French (not our mother tongue), and we continued the formalities of our first meeting in English. In a warm but reserved manner he said he would get in touch with me after reading the paper.

In early June of 1961, I received a short note from Beckett inviting me to his apart-

✪ JAY A. LEVY is a research physician in the School of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment. He later gave me his private number to use in the morning between 11:00 A.M. and noon, the only time when he took phone calls. That number served as our means of communication for many years afterwards. I was very excited at his probable appreciation of my thesis, but I was also worried about how I should act upon meeting him.

Beckett, then fifty-six years old, received me at 5:00 P.M. on June 13 in the study of his apartment on the seventh floor of a relatively new building. He had been living there only six months. He was dressed casually in a green sports jacket, brown gabardine slacks, and a plaid tie. The room, full of books, had his wooden desk and some modern chairs. The walls were painted in pale yellow and light tan. His hair was turning gray, and again, from my vantage point, he was a tall, imposing gentleman, but with a soft voice. Almost immediately, he offered me a drink. "Be a nice change from Scotch," he said jokingly as he gave me a glass of Irish whiskey. We sat for more than an hour discussing his work, although in retrospect, probably in a somewhat superficial way. He asked me many questions about my life and my interest in biology. He shared with me his views on literature and assured me that he never denied that Godot was God; however, he did not intend it to have any specific meaning. Godot could be representative of one's goal or objective. He agreed that some of my analogies, such as the removal of shoes in the first act, fit biblical accounts about the respect given to holy places, but said that he in no way had the Bible in mind when he wrote the play.

During our conversation he told me how, at about my age (then I was twenty-two), he had met a writer, and later, because of the difficulty with that writer's sight, he was asked to be his scribe. At the time, I did not appreciate that Beckett was himself having eyesight problems, but I did appreciate the possibility that I was receiving an indirect invitation to join him as his assistant, as he had done for James Joyce. For a split second, I toyed with the fantasy of asking him whether he was looking for an assistant, but what would I answer to an affirmative reply? I realized that I had medical school and a science education ahead of me, and a father who did not even fully understand a year's interval from schooling. I decided, therefore, to consider this comment as merely a reflection on an event in his life that had some similarities to mine.

He told me how he loved the theater and saw it as truly representative of art, but hated when the performers played to the public: it ruined the play when they attempted to impress the audience. He mentioned that he particularly liked Dennis Johnson, who was Irish and the producer of several of his plays. He kept Beckett's lines exact—a feature Beckett demanded (although did not always get) from all directors of his plays. He said he had never tried cinema because he didn't know the medium. Nevertheless, some years later he would dramatically use this form of art in his short movie *Film*.

We discussed writers. He had never met Camus but respected him and enjoyed his work more than that of Sartre. Sartre he found too political in recent years. He thought Schehadé was very poetic—"an Oriental Parisien," but not dramatic enough despite good reading. He found Adamov "politically minded," whose early plays, particularly *Professor Taruma*, he liked best.

During our meeting, Beckett told me that he had just finished a new play called *Happy Days* and mailed it that morning to the publisher. No other comment about the work was made except that he wrote this play first in English and thought it would be produced in the States. He considered plays a rest from writing books. He gave me as a small gift *Comment C'est*, his latest book, and inscribed it. As I left he encouraged me to write him in August to plan another get-together before I left Paris. Unfortunately, since he was on vacation in late August and most of September, I did not have that opportunity before returning to medical school in New York.

By the time of our good-byes, he had already told me about his wife, Suzanne, whom I could hear in the kitchen adjoining the study. I would in later sessions ask to meet her, but never did. In other visits, I also subtly tried to get invited into other parts of the apartment, but, aside from one time in his kitchen, I was always greeted in his study, which changed little over the ten years I visited him there. In the following twenty years, we usually met at the Closerie de Lilas at Denfort-Rochereau and then later at the Café François at the PCM Hotel, which is located just across from his apartment on the boulevard St-Jacques.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In 1963, having seen *Happy Days* during one of its early performances in New York, I wrote Beckett a long letter about my enthusiasm for the show, for Ruth White, for the other performers, and for the excellent dialogue. When I purchased a copy of the play, I tried to locate the quotations that were part of the piece but found only a few that I could reference. During a subsequent visit to Paris, when we discussed this play in his study, I mentioned my interest in knowing how he had found these quotations. He told me that several came from old Irish writings and poems and promised to send me a copy of the play with the quotations cited. Several months later I received this well-annotated book, which has become a treasured part of my Beckett collection.

From July 1962 to June 1963, my twin brother, Stuart, also a medical student, spent a year in Paris working at the Institut Radium with Professor Raymond Latarjet. He, too, called Beckett at his special number and met him several times during that period. On several occasions, Beckett would call Stuart at his apartment on rue l'Abbé de l'Epée to arrange the meetings. One such get-together, on April 19, 1962, at the Closerie de Lilas, Stuart recalls as very cordial. It began with a tomato juice before they had lunch—piparade basque omelet. Their discussion included the theater, the cinema, and Beckett's reading of Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Beckett preferred *Zoo Story* because it seemed better for the theater. Apparently, Alan Schneider had asked Beckett to translate *Virginia Woolf* into French, but Beckett thought it would not do well in Paris.

My brother Stuart asked Beckett how he decided to write. He replied, "When there was nothing else left for me to do . . . I had no money, I started to write." He did not regard himself as a professional writer, but as a French "man of letters." "I write comme ça," he said. Stuart gave him several articles on science, but Beckett didn't have his glasses so it was difficult for him to read them. Nevertheless, showing a lot of charm and humility, he inquired about experiments in the laboratory. They were both amused by the interchange of their interests in science and the theater. Beckett offered an explanation. He said that the laboratory was like the theater. The scientist is the director and the test tubes are the players. "You may predict what will happen, but you do not know exactly how it is going to turn out."

My next visit with Beckett was on June 2, 1965, almost four years after our first meeting in Paris. Stuart and I met him at Closerie de Lilas for a delightful lunch. He was vigorous and lively, with more color in his face than I had remembered. His demeanor was once again warm and friendly. He was visibly pleased to see us together. We had drinks (our usual Irish whiskey) followed by the main course of salmon with salad. The lunch was topped by crepes suzette; he insisted we try them. We shared with him our recent trips to Africa in 1964 and our current research interest in tropical diseases. We were again touched by his enthusiasm for science and his knowledge of it. He told us of his new four-minute play *Va et Vient*. He joked that at first it was quite long, and he kept "perfecting" it. He translated it for a friend in England who was opening a café-theater and called the play *Come and Go*. According to Beckett, it did not translate well from the French. He also had written a short piece, *Eh Joe*, for the BBC. He told us of his visit to the States in July of the past year when he was working on a film directed by Alan Schneider. He did not want to go to New York but liked the challenge of doing cinema.

During that trip, his only visit to the United States, he entered the office of Grove Press and the secretary greeted him with the comment, "Mr. Beckett, it's a pleasure to see you here. I have 'hellos' from my two friends Stuart and Jay Levy." She was a friend of ours and forwarded our greeting on her own. He later graciously arranged for *Film*, starring Buster Keaton (his choice of actor for the role), to be shown to us whenever we would like. Needless to say, during the 1960s in medical school in New York, being able to call and have a private showing of a film by Samuel Beckett was nothing short of a "happening." I saw it before I left medical school for internship in Philadelphia. Stuart saw it when he came to New York for his post-medical training.

During that 1965 visit, Beckett also spoke to us of his wife's travels in Spain, Czechoslovakia, and Vienna with friends and their hopes of taking a month's vacation in August. He had a country home near Paris that he worked on when he could find the time. He shared with



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

us as well his pleasure that his nephew, Edward, had won first prize in a flute composition at the Paris Conservatory. Edward was the son of his brother who had died from lung cancer. Despite this family tragedy, Beckett continued to chain-smoke throughout the years we knew him. He also spoke of his cousin's great ability in playing the piano. Both relatives were then in Paris and had been playing duets at his apartment for several days. Beckett loved music and greatly enjoyed these sessions.

Our conversation turned to golf and he mentioned that at one time his handicap was as low as seven. We invited him to visit us in the States where we could play the game together. He seemed genuinely interested in visiting, but said he had seldom played in the past thirty years. During this two-and-one-half-hour lunch, he also commented that Albee's play *Tiny Alice* was too long, and he understood why Sartre, for political reasons, refused the Nobel Prize in 1964. He was faithful to his belief, but Beckett questioned Sartre's refusal to accept an honorary degree from Columbia University since it was a private university.

During this reunion, Beckett also confided in us, who were now physicians, the problem of his failing eyesight. He told us that he was going to enter a nearby hospital, the Hotel Dieu, where the nuns would take care of him. Stuart and I inquired about this hospital and contacted other physicians in Paris to assure Beckett that his eye treatment was the best available. His poor eyesight was present during the making of his film in New York, and clearly its relevance to the film was apparent: the emphasis on the eye is paramount to the theme. (He was operated on for cataracts in 1970 and 1971.)

My next meeting with Sam (as he now signed his letters) was July 27, 1971, ten years after our first conversation. We met at the Closerie. Dressed in a brown sports coat, tan pants, and a dark blue tie, he was as warm and genuine as ever and acted as if we had not been long separated. He would not discuss the Nobel Prize awarded two years earlier. He spoke about his eye surgery, about which he had written me in March of that year. The first cataract was removed in October 1970 and the second in February of this year. "Both were successful and close vision is excellent." Sam had wanted the operations done near home in case he wandered and could not easily find his way back to the apartment. He didn't feel he would like contacts and was surprised to learn that I wore them. I took one out to show him. He seemed interested and said he might try them.

We talked of his father in Ireland who was a surveyor—"a boring job"—and of his older brother (by four years) who "unfortunately took the same profession." He was the one who died in the 1950s from lung cancer. Beckett refused to believe cigarette smoking was involved in the cancer, and he remained a chain-smoker. In 1968, Beckett had lung abscesses and stopped smoking for one year but then took it up again. We talked also this visit about his uncle, his last living relative, who had died a few months earlier. Apparently he had had poor circulation and had lost both legs and then went blind—almost like the character from *End Game*. Still the man remained quite happy, active, and alert. Sam seemed impressed with this. I asked him whether this uncle was the basis for the character in *End Game*, but he said he had written the play before his uncle's illness.

Beckett mentioned that he had last visited Ireland in 1968 when he went home for the funeral of his beloved aunt. He said he wouldn't go again because of what he feared would be too much publicity. Some years earlier, Beckett told me, he had taught two years in France and a few years at Trinity College in Ireland, but he didn't like it. This time he said he truly wanted to be a teacher but didn't admit it because now he'd be a professor at Trinity. He preferred to write and had decided that was the profession to follow.

During this visit in 1971, Sam also told me how he became associated with the rather controversial production *Oh, Calcutta!* He was asked to write a script for the show and thought it would be a vaudeville-like review and contributions would be anonymous. At this visit he called it "rubbish." In his original writing of this thirty-second piece called *Breath*, a baby cries in the center of the stage, the light goes up with the cry, then descends and then another cry occurs. The producer changed it and added naked bodies to the performance. He was angered but was only able to get his name disassociated with productions outside the United States.

We spoke of Suzanne, who he mentioned



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loved Italy where they had just been on vacation. Beckett smiled with real affection when he talked of her. She used to teach as well. When we parted, I noted that he was now wearing gold-rimmed, regular glasses, not the dark bifocals. He was thinner than before but looking about the same after six years.

Our next meeting was December 16, 1971. I met him at 5:30 in the afternoon at his apartment. I remembered the entrance and mailbox where I had left the paper more than ten years before. He met me at the elevator on the seventh floor. He had a slight cold but otherwise was much the same. He wore tan slacks and a maroon turtleneck. He took me around the office area where I had been before. I saw paintings over his couch; the walls were cracking with age, and lots of books were scattered behind his desk. I gave him a copy of the chimpanzee article that Stuart and I had published in *Nature* after our trip in 1970 to find human viruses in this primate species in Africa. He seemed touched that I had thought of bringing it. He said that he had spent most of his time recently working on new prose. He had no plays in mind at the moment. I asked him if he felt as enthusiastic and energetic as he did ten years ago or whether he was ready to relax. He said, with a smile, "No, I still have a lot of spunk left in me if that's what you mean." He was eager to get back to writing now that his eyes were better, and he was happy that he could drive again. He enjoyed going to his country home about forty-five minutes by train from Paris, where he would pick up his old car and drive to the house. It was a small place with a bedroom, kitchen, and dining room, on about one hectare of land. He had done a lot of his writing there over the past ten years.

I ventured to ask him what he considered his best play and was surprised when he answered *End Game*, not *Waiting for Godot*. He couldn't give details on why he felt this way. We walked into the kitchen to get ice for our Irish whiskeys. From the windows, since it was clear outside, I could see many rooftops of Paris, and it reminded me of the view I had had from my fifth-floor walk-up at Le Grand Hotel in 1961. Before he had moved to this apartment in the fifteenth arrondissement, he had lived with Suzanne in an apartment nearby. When asked about his family, he said he had very few family members in France aside from a cousin, a social worker in a nearby hospital. When I left after three hours, it was only because I was late for dinner with friends. Beckett asked me to call him in January before he went south to Morocco to find "some sun," but we were unable to arrange another meeting that year.

In 1976, Stuart again spent several months doing research in Paris at the Pasteur Institute. He took the occasion to meet Beckett, usually at his apartment. Stuart again shared results of his laboratory experiments with Sam and was encouraged by his enthusiasm for the work. In June of that year, Stuart asked Sam if he would meet our parents during the time of their visit to Paris. Much to his surprise, Sam said that he would be very pleased and accepted Stuart's invitation to come to his apartment to have cocktails with them. My mother's remark, "What will I say, I've never met a real intellectual" has become legendary in the family. But the man they met proved to be no intimidating figure. He had walked from his apartment on boulevard St-Jacques to visit them at 4 rue du Four—about a twenty-minute walk. He strode into the room, relaxed in a wide-winged chair, and proceeded to carry on casual conversation, including a discussion with my father about his early days playing golf in Ireland. At that time, Beckett had scored in the high seventies. They all had drinks and talked about many different subjects of common interest. He showed Dad, a physician, his right hand with the Dupuytren's contracture. The shortening and thickening of the tendons in the palm had caused a deformity of his index finger.

Beckett was not in a rush and stayed about two hours. Thus, to our family, Samuel Beckett was certainly not the recluse often cited in comments about him and his life. In all our relationships with him, he was always a warm, receptive, and generous man. Over the years, he shared with me several texts that he wrote, and he answered all of my letters, if just by a small note, including our last exchange about six months before his death. One treasured volume he sent in 1977 to my wife, Sharon, and me as a wedding gift—one of the first printings of his book on Proust *(Three Dialogues)*.

It was, however, two years after that, in 1978, when I would meet him again. This time, we got together at the Café Français at the PCM Hotel at 17 boulevard St-Jacques



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just across the street from his hotel. We met there because he said the tourists bothered him now at the Closerie. He arrived at about 11:00 in the morning. You could see him walking in his characteristic lanky manner, a little more unsteady than before. Sharon was with me at the time; we were on our way for a sabbatical year, the first half in Israel and then the second half in Paris. He began by inquiring about Stuart and our parents and asked about my research. As I was discussing it in some detail, he turned to Sharon and said, "Jay always thinks I understand what he's doing, but I just look like I do." He asked as well about the study Stuart had done on the transfer of bacterial antibiotic resistance from chickens to man. Despite his earlier comment on his limited knowledge of science, I was still amazed at how much he understood and that he remembered details from our previous conversations.

This time Beckett talked again about his trips to Germany to direct some of his plays. He traveled there every other year, and recently had met Jack Kerouac. He also went to Morocco for "some sun and swimming," and he was now translating and not working on anything new. I dared to ask him about his impressions of the biography of him by Deirdre Bair. He quickly remarked that he didn't want to talk about it: "I threw it away." Knowing he guarded his privacy, I was not surprised. We discussed Albee, who was supposed to be writing a new play. Beckett said that his problem was directing his own plays. That was a curious remark since Beckett was doing the same. We also spoke of Alan Schneider and how I had had the pleasure of being with him at Stanford for a three-day course on Beckett. Sam liked him very much because Schneider directed his plays correctly.

Beckett would, from time to time, engross me in conversations about my research in France or in the United States. When I first met him in 1961, I was working with Professor Lender at the Faculté de Science in Orsay on regeneration of planaria. When this freshwater flatworm is cut in half, it regenerates its tail or its head, whichever is missing. I kept thinking that Beckett might use this biologic event as some theme for a future literary piece of the "absurd"—but he never surprised me with that. Our discussions on cancer, and later on AIDS, always reflected his great interest in the subjects and his concern for finding solutions to these human diseases. But, most of all, I appreciated Sam's remembering certain details of my scientific work that I had discussed with him even years before. He was able to conceptualize areas of scientific study and to ask provocative questions.

Nine months later, after our return to Paris from Israel, Sharon, Stuart, and I met Beckett again at the Café Français. He looked healthy, active, and happy to see us. He recounted that he began playing golf at the age of twelve or thirteen and played with his Uncle Girard, a doctor, and his cousin. He commented that he knew Sartre in school in Paris. The man was "famous for his practical jokes; some of them cruel—like telling the professor his daughter had died in a car accident." He didn't know Simone de Beauvoir and never had met Gertrude Stein. She apparently had had a group of protégés separate from the one that surrounded James Joyce. He said similar literary associations exist in Paris today but are less defined and, in any case, he was not in any of them.

He had spent some time in January of that year in Tangiers with Suzanne in a hotel near the beach. He loved it there. He was going to his country home near Paris later in March and then on to London at the end of April to direct *Happy Days*. When we left we asked if we could take a picture. He graciously agreed, and Sharon snapped one of us with Sam, braced against a strong wind.

On April 20, 1980, Beckett wrote me, "Thank you for your letter of April 7 and your interesting account of *Piece of Monologue* at Stanford. Piece because unfinished—not to be continued. Light, walk, etc. have no symbolic significance for me. Dramatic components, nothing more." And, in a letter in July 1981, he wrote, "I had nothing to do with the staging of *Premier Amour*. The permission was for a straight reading. I have given no permission for staging Godot. So it goes in the theater."

I didn't see Sam again until June 26, 1986, during the time of the International AIDS meeting in Paris. My sister Ellen and I met him at the Café Français. We saw him standing in the lobby by the front desk looking out at the street. He was still impressive, though bent over a bit, and somewhat thin and frail. It was 11:00 A.M., our usual time to get together. Sam had never met Ellen, and I was eager to introduce him to yet another member of the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

family. He walked with a limp and seemed a bit weak, although his steel-blue eyes were still quite impressive. He showed me again his deformed right finger with Dupuytren's contracture. He complained of his breathing, but that difficulty had somewhat improved with time. He said he was in the hospital with emphysema—obviously from his smoking. He had just gotten out ten days before and felt better because he now used a spray. I again lectured him on cigarettes, but he said he smoked only ten a day. He asked, as usual, about my parents, Stuart, and Sharon. His speech was somewhat deliberate, and his mind, at eighty-one, seemed to be working at a slower pace.

He reminisced a bit about Sylvia Beach and her bookstore. He remarked that he had never read *A Moveable Feast* by Hemingway but told me not to send it, since he was trying to get rid of things around him. He lamented that Suzanne had cataracts, which had been operated on two months earlier, but she was doing all right. When he spoke of her, he seemed sad as if aging were more of a concern than before. He recalled his eye operations and the initial poor accommodation of his sight, although now his eyes were fine.

Despite his success and the fact that his publisher was good to him, I was surprised to hear that he had no secretary. He said he was not writing anything because of his constant lung problems and weakness—"just fixing up my affairs." He had hoped to go to the country where he kept his twenty-year-old car ("rusty but it works"). He was working on *Ohio Impromptu*. One interesting point he made at that meeting came when he reminisced about his concern about *Film*. At one point he had wanted the camera to focus on Buster Keaton's eyes, both close up and far away without any realization of change, but it didn't work because the lens was not good enough. He walked us to the corner and said good-bye as we went to the metro. In his usual manner, he checked to be sure we knew how to take the train.

In October 1988, Sam sent me a note stating, "Thank you for yours of October 3rd with good news of your research in pursuit of that scourge. Nothing of interest to tell. Age . . . has clawed me in his clutch. Affectionately to you all, Sam." I found it interesting that he referred to age in the masculine gender.

My last communication from him came in June 1989, when Sharon and I were in Paris for a meeting. We had hoped to see him again and his short note to me at the Mayflower Hotel read, "I am in a maison de retraite with health problems and cannot propose a meeting. Very sorry to miss you. Best wishes to you all. Sam." I regret now that I did not try harder to see him, for he died some months later.

During my several conversations with Samuel Beckett, he told me how very important it was that his plays be produced and directed in the way that he intended. He thought that the late Alan Schneider was the best director for his plays and had no problems in sharing any new works with him. These discussions on the direction of his plays led to his complaining to me during our first meeting, in 1961, about a rendition of *Waiting for Godot* about to be performed in Scotland; he had hoped to block it by legal action. "The production was billed as a rollicking comedy." He was appalled by the writer's changing of his intentions and "cheapening" the literary sense of the play. For example, he said to me, "Rien à faire," the opening line that in French means "nothing to be done," was loosely interpreted for the play as "nothing's doing." Subsequent lines also gave evidence to this "vulgarization" of his French version. It was also at this time that Beckett said to me, with a twinkle in his eye, that *Waiting for Godot* told the audience from the very start what was going to happen in the next three hours—"nothing."

In discussions with my brother Stuart, Sam confided that one of the reasons James Joyce held back his friendship from Beckett was Joyce's disappointment that he did not marry his daughter, Lucia. While this point has been made in some books about Beckett, we were touched that Beckett shared this information with us and substantiated some of the stories that later appeared in his biographies.

One basic characteristic of Samuel Beckett was his deep humility. On one visit, when I congratulated him upon receiving the French Book Award, he insisted that we change the subject. He told me that he did not like awards or the attention they brought him. Subsequently, when he won the Nobel Prize in 1969, Stuart and I telegrammed him from Washington, D.C., where we were doing research at the National Institutes of Health. The telegram arrived in Paris and was forwarded to him in Tunisia where he was vacationing (or avoiding the publicity). Shortly



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## MICHEL FOUCAULT

Didier Eribon

Translated by Betsy Wing

In this biography of the brilliant and controversial French intellectual, Didier Eribon provides a fascinating narrative that debunks the many myths and rumors surrounding Foucault. As a journalist well acquainted with him for years before his death, Eribon was particularly well placed to conduct the dozens of interviews which form the cornerstone of this enlightening profile.

31 halftones, $27.95 cloth

## DECIDING TO DECIDE

Agenda Setting in the United States Supreme Court

H. W. Perry, Jr.

In this unique study, H. W. Perry, Jr., takes the first hard look at the internal workings of the Supreme Court, illuminating its agenda-setting policies, procedures, and priorities as never before and vividly bringing it to life. He conveys a wealth of new information gathered from interviews with justices, solicitors general, judges, and Supreme Court law clerks and he proposes a new decision-making model for explaining judicial behavior.

$39.95 cloth

## THE VICHY SYNDROME

History and Memory in France since 1944

Henry Rousso

Translated by Arthur Goldhammer

From the Liberation purges to the Barbie trial, France has struggled with the memory of the Vichy experience: a vivid memory of defeat, occupation, and repression. In this provocative study, Henry Rousso examines how this proud nation —a nation where reality and myth commingle to confound understanding—has dealt with *les années noires*. Specifically, he studies what the French have chosen to remember and what they have chosen to conceal.

$19.95 cloth

## "COMING TO WRITING" AND OTHER ESSAYS

Hélène Cixous

Edited by Deborah Jenson

With an introductory essay by Susan Rubin Suleiman

Of Hélène Cixous's many and diverse writings, few have been translated into English. This collection presents six essays by one of France's most remarkable contemporary authors. Here she explores the problematics of a "feminine" mode of writing, basing her method on the premise that differences between the sexes—viewed as a paradigm for all difference, which is the organizing principle between identity and meaning—manifest themselves, write themselves, in texts.

$24.95 cloth

## A HISTORY OF PRIVATE LIFE

*Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, General Editors*

Volume V: Riddles of Identity in Modern Times

Edited by Antoine Prost and Gérard Vincent

Translated by Arthur Goldhammer

In this fifth and final volume of the award-winning series, nine noted historians chart the remarkable inner history of our times from the tumult of World War I to the present day, when personal identity was released from its moorings in gender, family, social class, religion, and politics.

*The Belknap Press*

16 color illus., 230 halftones, 736 pp., $39.95 cloth

**Harvard University Press**

79 Garden Street Cambridge, MA 02138

(617) 495-2480



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thereafter we received a letter of thanks from him for the telegram, but subsequent reference to his Nobel award would also be cut off by his changing the subject.

Some of our conversations over those nearly thirty years dealt with issues I felt Beckett might not like to speak about with others. I was neither a writer nor a scholar doing research on his works. Instead I was a twenty-two-year-old pre-med student when we met, and our friendship continued because we shared a love of the theater and of French, and because I admired Beckett's challenging literary pieces. Sam saw me in a different field of study—medicine—and in many ways followed my career's development and the evolution of my family with a warm interest. During our last meeting in Paris I spoke to him, with a sincerity that I was never quite sure he fully appreciated, of the faith and optimism I drew from his experiences—particularly the problem he faced in publishing *Waiting for Godot*. I often share that story with my students and scientific colleagues who have their papers, grants, or books rejected. Samuel Beckett sent *Waiting for Godot* to many different editors, and it was finally accepted after four years by a small publishing company. The rest is history.

## Coping with Utopia

SOVIET CIVILIZATION: A CULTURAL HISTORY. *By Andrei Sinyavsky. Translated by Joanne Turnbull with the assistance of Nikolai Formozov. Little, Brown. $24.95.*

Reviewed by GARY SAUL MORSON

For Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the great symbol of Soviet history is the infamous Gulag Archipelago, the chain of "corrective labor" camps (as they were euphemistically called) in which tens of millions of people were arbitrarily incarcerated. Vasily Grossman, a Soviet journalist who wrote a classic account of Treblinka and two posthumously published novels, singles out the terror-famine of the early thirties, in which some seven million peasants were systematically starved to death while well-fed Bolshevik officials on the scene made sure no food got through. His most memorable passage describes dying peasants congregating along the tracks of passing trains that had been deliberately sealed so that passengers could not throw food to the weakened beggars. Because these "kulaks" were killed for no reason other than their "class origin," Grossman, alluding to the Nazis, defines Marxism as racism by class.

For all the power of such images, American readers have been singularly able to resist them. Sinyavsky acidly remarks on the protection that left-wing convictions seem to offer to "anti-Soviet propaganda"; and we might wonder at the mental mechanisms that have allowed intellectuals who are horrified by "Holocaust revisionism"—the attempts to deny, minimize, or direct attention away from the Nazi atrocities—to engage in what might be called Gulag revisionism.

Sinyavsky is shrewd enough to recognize that political predispositions do not explain everything about our reaction to even the most moving accounts of Soviet terror. Sitting in our living rooms or studies, Western intellectuals, who have more experience with sympathy than with suffering, perhaps tend to imagine ourselves not as victims but as our closest counterparts, Soviet intellectuals, whom we implicitly picture reading in their own living rooms. After reading *Soviet Civilization*, we will not yield to this identification so readily.

For one thing, Soviet intellectuals would probably not have living rooms. They would instead be living in a communal apartment, in which each person might—if lucky—be allotted the requisite nine square meters (ninety-seven square feet) of space, and in which kitchens, bathrooms, and corridors would be shared with numerous strangers. For Sinyavsky, the symbol of Soviet civilization is not the forced labor camp but the constant daily irritations, unimaginable even to many poor Americans, produced by the most prosaic needs, such as using the toilet, arguing about whether rinsing a diaper should take precedence over cooking when there is only one

✪ GARY SAUL MORSON is Frances Hooper Professor of Slavic Languages and Literature at Northwestern University and co-author, with Caryl Emerson, of *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

faucet, and figuring out who should pay what on the electric bill. "The word 'neighbors' has a sinister connotation in the context of the communal apartment," Sinyavsky observes dryly. "The Communist brotherhood is transformed into the most terrible civil strife."

Unlike documentaries, novels, or histories, Sinyavsky's book captures daily life by a shrewd combination of reflection, analysis, telling quotations from literature, and, above all, a marvelous display of a form he discusses at some length, the anti-Soviet anecdote. One might even read this book for its judicious assembly of citations or as an anthology of what Sinyavsky calls "quasi-folklore."

In his chapter "The Soviet Way of Life," Sinyavsky introduces communal living with a passage from the Soviet satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko, whose story "Summer Respite" is told from the perspective of a quite ordinary person trying to adapt Communist ideology to his actual daily experience:

> Of course, to occupy one's own, separate apartment is philistinism. One must live all together, as one big family, and not lock oneself away in one's castle home.
>
> One must live in a communal apartment. In the open. Where there's always someone to talk to. Someone to go to for advice. Someone to pick a fight with.
>
> Of course, there are drawbacks.

Zoshchenko's story centers on squabbles over dividing the electric bill, and Sinyavsky, switching from fiction to reminiscence, testifies that "this incident is neither invention nor hyperbole." Though a distinguished scholar, Sinyavsky lived in a communal apartment for forty years. There he had ample occasion to reflect on the consequences of socialist contempt for such "bourgeois individualist" desires as solitude and a room (let alone a home) of one's own. As in Zoshchenko's story, Sinyavsky's neighbors complained that he was using too much electricity by staying up late reading. So he installed his own meter for his room. But at night he also went into the corridor or kitchen or out-of-doors with his dog, all at the expense of communal electricity. So he installed his own corridor lights connected to his meter. Then it was calculated that the dog, with four feet, tracked in more dirt than two-footed neighbors, who complained that Sinyavsky was not doing his fair share of the cleaning; so he started carrying his dog through the corridors. Of course, all these concessions actually made his neighbors angrier: where does the gentleman get the money for his own meter? What exactly is he reading anyway? Maybe he is an American spy burning the midnight oil?

For me, Sinyavsky's most powerful vignette concerns the practice of locking one's pots—not even when they are out of use so they will not be stolen—but while they are in use, on the stove. One always locks the lid on, otherwise some neighbor with whom one is quarreling will spit in the pot, or put dirt in it, or steal the meat, not out of need but out of spite. There is something in Soviet life that seems to bring out Dostoyevskian tendencies. So to stir one's soup one must lock and re-lock the pot. For Americans, images like these may do something to temper automatic denigration of middle-class values and material comforts.

Sinyavsky could have chosen to focus on more dramatic horrors. He was, after all, a writer arrested for publishing abroad, under the pseudonym Abram Tertz, anti-Soviet literature, which is actually not an unfair description of *The Trial Begins, Lyubimov* (English title: *The Makepeace Experiment*), and his classic essay, "On Socialist Realism." Sinyavsky's conviction in 1966 dramatically signaled the regime's turn from the relative openness of the Khrushchev years to what has come to be known as Brezhnev's era of stagnation. The smuggled transcripts of the proceedings, available in a translated volume entitled *On Trial: The Soviet State versus "Abram Tertz" and "Nikolai Arzhak,"* make some of the most gripping reading of the whole Brezhnev era. After seven years in the Gulag, Sinyavsky emigrated to France, where he has published such works as *Goodnight!* and *A Voice from the Chorus*. It is all the more interesting, therefore, that in this book he chose to stress the annoyances of Soviet daily life more than its major catastrophes or its persecution of great writers.

For Sinyavsky, both the dramatic and the undramatic horrors of Communism derive from its utopianism. An ideology, based on supposedly scientific principles, forms the basis for a final solution to all problems, and leads, in its fanatic intolerance, to untold human misery. Indeed, this is the great story not only of Soviet Russia but also of the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twentieth century generally, which is for Sinyavsky "the century of utopias found or being found, utopias that most often take the form of ideological or ideocratic states." We see this pattern from the Third Reich to the Khmer Rouge, and perhaps the real significance of Soviet Russia is that it "pioneered this utopia and set the example."

In short, *Soviet Civilization* constitutes one of the more interesting anti-utopian documents of our age, which, in reaction to the triumph of so many would-be millenarians the world over, has produced more than its share. Sinyavsky is not the least bit afraid to praise those qualities and virtues that utopians usually hold in contempt, such as individual initiative (Soviet history offering an object lesson in collectivist economics), personal responsibility, and even the "petit-bourgeois way of life," which those who have been forced to live without it come to appreciate. Here especially we see the difference between so many Russian intellectuals and their radical American counterparts. "People cannot burn with revolutionary fervor forever in the name of bright ideals," Sinyavsky contends. "Their life depends on the present, not some radiant future; they must live in their own house, not on a universal scale." Better today's prosaic eggs than the future omlette of our dreams. Utopians always sacrifice the present and the people in it for the sake of a grand design for history's end; but it is in the present that everyone always lives.

Sinyavsky therefore begins his book with an account of the mystique of revolution, which has of course been shared by many intellectuals in the twentieth century. By "the Russian revolution," Sinyavsky means not just the events that he calls (accurately enough) the "coup d'état of October 1917" but some two decades of fascination with upheaval and millenarian transformation. He follows the Russian philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev in seeing the Russian revolutionary ethos as essentially the eschatological fantasies of an atheist religion, according to which the apocalypse was to be brought about not by divine intervention but by human effort. Soviet Marxism offered "an Apocalypse grounded in dialectical materialism . . . so that the idea of providence is transformed into a historical law ordained by Marx." Remarkably enough, Sinyavsky observes, such ideas "still fascinate and seduce, not Soviet people, of course, but people in other countries."

It is in this quasi-religious context that Sinyavsky places such Bolshevik actions as ritual desecrations—not just removing icons from churches but using them to make floors for the village bath or lining them up against the wall to be shot. The early attacks on pre-revolutionary literature and the later institutionalization of socialist realism reflect the same salvationist mentality. So does the cult of violence, which took on the mystical aura of expiatory sacrifice—not sacrifice of oneself, to be sure, but of others, "class enemies." A particularly chilling section of Sinyavsky's book describes the adulation heaped on the founder of the secret police, the murderer and torturer Feliks Dzerzhinsky. Feliks became a popular name for babies, and writers who should have known better, Isaac Babel as well as Maxim Gorky, felt honored to associate with this man because his killings were in the name of a great ideal and were performed without personal benefit. Dzerzhinsky is described as gentle with children and hoping he could some day serve them in all kindness as People's Commissar of Education. According to Sinyavsky, it was this idealism and lack of self-interest that gave Dzerzhinsky unusual influence over Lenin.

Lenin himself is described, somewhat improbably, as a person who also acted purely out of idealistic motives. In a wise strategic move, Sinyavsky accepts the official image of Lenin as free of human foibles and (like Dzerzhinsky) entirely unselfish. Sinyavsky is therefore able to refute all those apologies for Communism that deem its failures mere aberrations based on the accidental flaws of its leaders—a point that is in any case strange, as Sinyavsky points out, when enunciated by proponents of an ideology that allows only class interests, not individuals, to shape history.

Sinyavsky's Lenin is the pure selfless intellectual, who even had an amazingly and symbolically large cranium, a "hyperbolic" head. He incarnated the spirit of rationalist utopianism in its perfect form, which is why his incomprehensible violence indicts not him but his ideological project. "The incomprehensibility of Lenin is precisely this all-consuming intellectuality—the fact that from his calculations, from his neat pen, flowed seas of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PITTSBURGH
*Poetry Series*

## Walking Distance
*Debra Allbery*

WINNER OF THE 1990 AGNES LYNCH STARRETT POETRY PRIZE

"Her plainspoken, intimate narratives take on the underside of American life, and search out its imaginative possibilities, its spiritual glimmerings."—J.D. McClatchy

*October / 64 pp. / $17.95 cloth (3687-9)*
*$9.95 paper (5458-3)*

## Mercy
*Kathleen Peirce*

WINNER OF THE 1990 ASSOCIATED WRITING PROGRAMS' AWARD SERIES IN POETRY
SELECTED BY ELLEN BRYANT VOIGT

"*Mercy* is a work of profound beauty and courage and spiritual accountability."—Jorie Graham

*October / 64 pp. / $17.95 cloth (3686-0)*
*$9.95 paper (5457-5)*

## Liquid Paper: New and Selected Poems
*Peter Meinke*

Collects the best of his previously published poems from the late 1960s on with a generous selection of new work.

*November / 120 pp. / $24.95 cloth (3681-X)*
*$12.95 paper (5455-9)* *ISBN Prefix 0-8229*

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH PRESS
c/o CUP Services, Box 6525, Ithaca, NY 14851
(412) 648-1453



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blood, whereas by nature this was not an evil person. On the contrary, Vladimir Ilyich was a rather kind person whose cruelty was stipulated by science and incontrovertible historical laws." His enemies used to say that he loved power, but "his love of power (if it was that) was devoid of any intoxication with power."

For Lenin, power was simply the tool for putting the abstract ideology into effect in a world where specific people were bound by class interest to resist. So devoted was Lenin to Marxist abstractions that he once told his comrades to take care of their health because their lives were state property. Recognizing that the Communist state could never survive without violence, he justified terror on strictly logical grounds. Sinyavsky cites Lenin's definition of dictatorship and Soviet state power: "The scientific concept of a dictatorship signifies nothing other than a power which, unrestricted by any laws, uninhibited by any absolute rules, resorts freely to the use of violence." "There is no denying the honesty of this formula," Sinyavsky concedes.

Certain Western Marxists, Sinyavsky reminds us, have idealized Lenin by saying that he, unlike the aberrant Stalin, saw violence as a merely temporary measure during the first phase of the revolution. In reply, Sinyavsky points out that in peaceful 1922 Lenin insisted that the Soviet law code contain an explicit justification for terror. Lenin wrote to People's Commissar of Justice Dmitri Kursky: "Jurisprudence must not eliminate terror; to promise this would be to deceive oneself or to deceive others. It must vindicate and legalize it." Not that Lenin was cruel; he simply foresaw, as his apologists do not, that Communism cannot survive in any other way.

This pure ideologue therefore established what Sinyavsky calls "a state of scholars." Those trained in the infallible science of Marxism would make all decisions. No longer was Russia to be ruled by tsars, generals, or lawyers, but "by wise men and . . . what you might call scientific experts in political struggle." Here one detects an allusion to Plato's idea of the philosopher-king and, indirectly, to the whole tradition of utopian thought, which Sinyavsky rejects. True to utopian form, Soviet people in the new classless society were divided into the governed and the governing, the latter trained in state-of-the-art methods of applying Marxism to society. "In other words, the State is governed by scholars," the most scholarly of which was Lenin himself. One lesson of Sinyavsky's book that may disturb many of his readers is the danger of intellectuals' characteristic faith in their own superior ability to wield power for the public good.

Once Leninist beliefs took hold, bureaucracy inevitably followed. With decisions left to ideological experts and mistakes (whether intentional or not) regarded as "objectively" the result of bourgeois class interests, initiative necessarily died and bureaucracy consequently increased in an accelerating spiral. So did the need for more and more violence to get things done.

Thus, we recognize the error of those Western apologists—Sinyavsky's repeated target—who claim that the system that governed the U.S.S.R. is not true socialism but some perversion they call state capitalism. In a trivial sense, this "is a semantic argument . . . since no one has ever seen another socialism or 'real' socialism full blown." More important, we may object that what exists was the logical outgrowth of the initial ideas, which is why it has been repeated in state after socialist state. How many examples need there be before the "aberration" is recognized as the rule?

For Sinyavsky, something like Stalinism was bound to result from Marxist-Leninist ideology combined with absolute power and a belief in the legitimacy of violence against class enemies. To be sure, there were some significant differences between Lenin and Stalin. As Sinyavsky phrases it, Stalin realized Lenin's metaphors. Whereas the founder of the Soviet state believed only that class enemies were "objectively" guilty of treason—he did not imagine that they were all actually spying for foreign powers, just that their actions served the interests of Russia's enemies—Stalin charged people with actually committing the treasonous acts. But this difference does not really matter so much as one might think, since for Lenin "objective" aid to the enemy, even by people who sincerely intend no harm, merited death or exile in any case.

The apologists notwithstanding, "Stalin, in my opinion, did not distort Lenin, he simply assumed his position as head of the government. . . . Stalin was not a usurper but Lenin's



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

legitimate heir . . . a faithful Leninist, but one who applied the idea of absolute dictatorship in his own, Stalin-like way." It is in his account of that "Stalin-like way" that Sinyavsky's gifts as an imaginative writer, with perfect examples, citations, and anecdotes at his command, shine through with special power. For one thing, Stalin took Leninist totalitarianism to an extreme. One story concerns a woman arrested for having unethical erotic dreams about the leaders; others describe arrests for misprints, which, given the conspiratorial mentality of Communism, were regarded as intentional (or "objective") sabotage. It was a doctrine that led publishers to appreciate formulaic expressions, preset phrases, and prefabricated units of thought.

But Stalin's greatest "achievement" was to turn life into art—not into the benign idyll that Communism promises but into a grotesque black comedy performed with millions of human lives. With his profound contempt for people, he "used them like putty in the crafting of his own design. . . . In his eyes he was the only actor-director on the stage of all Russia and all the world. In this sense, Stalin was a born artist." The show trials, for instance, were choreographed artfully enough that sympathetic Westerners, ready to suspend disbelief for the sake of their favorite cause, could vouch for the authenticity of the most amazing and self-contradictory confessions. "One has to admit that these spectacles were superbly staged and produced," Sinyavsky observes. In his continuing polemic with Western leftists, he quotes the German writer Lion Feuchtwanger's eyewitness account of one 1937 proceeding:

> If this trial was staged, then the director would have to have had several years and numerous rehearsals to get such a seamless performance from the accused. . . . They all confessed, but each in his own way: one in a cynical tone, another in a crisp, soldierlike style, a third resisting inwardly, running for cover, a fourth like a repentant schoolboy, a fifth sermonizing. But their inflections, facial expressions, and gestures, all rang true.

Lenin confessed to lacking a sense of humor, but the genre at which Stalin excelled was black comedy, the practical joke inflated to metaphysical proportions. Take the infamous Kirov murder, which provided an excuse for the Great Purges in which millions died: Stalin had Sergei Kirov, a relatively obscure party official, killed, turned him ex post facto into a great leader slain by enemies of the people, and, while hunting down his supposed murderers, publicly mourned "their" victim. Stalin quite literally put Kirov "on the map" by naming a whole series of cities after him: Kirovsk, Kirovograd, Kirovokan, "and so on." In fact, Stalin resembles no one so much as Woland—the devil as cruel trickster—in the greatest masterpiece of postrevolutionary Russian literature, Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*.

From his aesthetic sense, Stalin knew how to trace arabesques of intrigue and to be artfully inconsistent—to favor Bulgakov while purging perfectly orthodox writers, to elevate an aide while arresting his family, to call officials on the phone without identifying himself until after receiving the usual rude answers, to embrace someone in public while whispering threats in his ear. Of course, there were also political benefits to this theater: it made the great leader mysterious and so conferred an almost mystical aura on his power and his terror. Was he, as persecuted theosophists believed, the incarnation of the Great Manu of India?

All this mystery appealed to the religious predisposition of Russians, and so Lenin's state of scholars gradually gave way to a peculiar Church-State, where rituals literally meant life or death. In more than one sense, living became an endless service. Day was given over to the terrifying blandness of socialist realism and night to the open secret of mass arrests, tortures, and "governmental sessions associated with binges of black humor and sinister buffoonery." I have called Bulgakov the great master of Soviet literature, but Sinyavsky would disagree: "Glancing back over the Stalin era, I can't find one artist who would have been worthy of Stalin" himself.

Under both Lenin and Stalin, official doctrine promised the creation of a "new man." Because people were held to be entirely the product of economic conditions, socialism was expected to change human nature. Above all, it would get rid of the individual personality, which is why communal apartments and the killing of initiative became conscious policy. A new morality also was shaped, based on the Marxist principles—if they can be so called—that, as Lenin wrote, there is no such



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing as "an eternal morality," that whatever serves the Party is good by definition, and that Communists must, "if need be, resort to any subterfuge, ruse, or illegal means, dissemble and conceal the truth." This is the morality of the revolutionaries in *The Possessed*, and Sinyavsky repeatedly invokes Dostoyevsky's prophetic masterpiece to elucidate the official Soviet mentality.

Following Lenin's dicta, compassion for enemies was declared evil, as Soviet novels repeatedly illustrated by describing loathsome bourgeois intellectuals who pity counter-revolutionaries or appeal to "universal human values." *Doctor Zhivago* was condemned because its hero accomplished what Sinyavsky calls "the feat of not killing, of refusing on moral grounds to obey the laws of the class struggle, where people annihilate each other for ideological or political reasons." Passages like these make it clear why Russian thinkers today so vehemently reject the language and ethos of "the class struggle."

In its fanatic devotion to an idea, the Soviet regime was the product of the nineteenth-century revolutionary intelligentsia. The Russian intelligentsia long dreamed of the new man who would purify society. "But when this man arrived and started shooting, the intelligentsia recoiled in horror, as if he were Frankenstein's monster." We can therefore appreciate why so many Russian dissidents have preferred to recapture a minority tradition and trace their origins to a different type of intellectual—to Chekhov, for instance—who expressed contempt for grand abstractions while insisting on prosaic daily life as all-important. And we can also understand the great interest today's intellectuals show in reading such previously suppressed works as *Landmarks: A Collection of Essays on the Russian Intelligentsia* (1909), which warned against the horrors of utopian ideology generally and of Marxism in particular.

Like some repentant Dr. Frankenstein, the Russian intelligentsia seems to be trying to redeem itself, which is why it so often reacts with wonder and horror at Western intellectuals who still discover romance in Marxism and mystique in revolution. American readers who pick up this book to learn about the strange world of others may find themselves in the uncomfortable activity of reflecting upon themselves.

# From Apollinaire's Knee

AN ESSAY ON FRENCH VERSE: FOR READERS OF ENGLISH POETRY. *By Jacques Barzun. New Directions. $22.95. Paper, $11.95.*

Reviewed by WALLACE FOWLIE

No one title would be adequate to describe the contents of this small book. Its author first carefully explains the rules of French prosody, and then he explores the changes it underwent in each century. The ten-syllable line of *La Chanson de Roland* in the eleventh century was recast into the twelve-syllable line, the alexandrine, in the thirteenth century. These two major types of lines remain the favorites in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Professor Barzun contrasts the classical alexandrine line with the iambic pentameter used by Shakespeare. The history of France and the political systems have affected the lives of the poets and influenced the development of French poetry from century to century. All of these topics—aesthetics, theory, history, biography, social change—are included in this "essay on French verse," because the central preoccupation of the critic is language.

France grew into a nation from the ruins of the Roman civilization in Gaul, and at the same time a new language evolved. The language had a simple origin. With few exceptions French comes directly from Latin. The pre-Roman Celts left almost no traces in the new language. There were a few hundred words introduced by the Frankish conquerors. Whereas the English language has a double origin from the Roman occupation and the Saxon invaders, the literature of France, like its language, is homogeneous. The more complex origin of English has enabled English writers to reach effects of diversity and strangeness and richness. Such traits characterize English literature. The genius of French, coming from its sole origin in Latin, is still today characterized by simplicity and clarity.

English critics of French poetry have

✪ WALLACE FOWLIE, professor of French at Duke University, is the author of, most recently, *Sites: A Third Memoir; Characters from Proust: Poems;* and *Aubade: A Teacher's Notebook.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# WINTER READING

## The Bounds of Race

*Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*

Edited by **DOMINICK LACAPRA.** These essays argue persuasively that the existing canon must be expanded and that the protocols of interpretation must be transformed to make a prominent place for such issues as race. "All of these essays possess an energy and originality that make them individually useful."—Houston A. Baker, Jr., University of Pennsylvania. $41.50 cloth, $14.95 paper

## American Nervousness, 1903

*An Anecdotal History*

By **TOM LUTZ.** "Witty, concrete, . . . and intellectually pluralistic. [Lutz brings] a fresh, panoramic perspective to the complex give-and-take between illness and the artistic and intellectual imagination." —*New York Times Book Review*. $29.95

## "The Hour of Eugenics"

*Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America*

By **NANCY LEYS STEPAN.** "A first-rate book. Stepan describes the development of the Latin American eugenics movement in the context of the parallel development of European eugenics."—Thomas F. Glick, Boston University. $31.50

## Myths of Empire

*Domestic Politics and International Ambition*

By **JACK SNYDER.** "*Myths of Empire* is a superb analysis of one of the most dangerous ills that can beset the foreign policy of a great power."—Michael Doyle, Princeton University. $35.00

## The Oldest Vocation

*Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*

By **CLARISSA W. ATKINSON.** "A richly documented account of the social construction of motherhood, this work is impressive in its scholarship and scope, instructive and very readable."—Gerda Lerner, University of Wisconsin, Madison. $24.95

## The Heritage of Giotto's Geometry

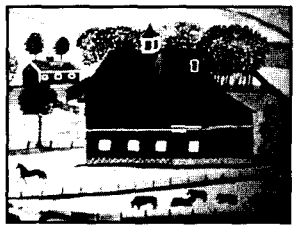
*Art and Science on the Eve of the Scientific Revolution*

By **SAMUEL Y. EDGERTON, JR.** This ambitious book explores the relationship between the Western "scientific revolution" that began with Galileo in the early seventeenth century and the Renaissance "artistic revolution" inaugurated by Giotto three hundred years earlier. $39.95

## News from the Land of Freedom

*German Immigrants Write Home*

Edited by **WALTER D. KAMPHOEFNER, WOLFGANG HELBICH,** and **ULRIKE SOMMER.** Translated by **Susan Carter Vogel.** "Wonderful."—Frederick C. Luebke, University of Nebraska. In this major collection of letters, German immigrants in the United States write back to friends and family in Germany, recounting the events of the years 1830 – 1930. $35.00



At bookstores, or call 607-277-2211 (credit card orders only)

**Cornell University Press** / 124 Roberts Place, Ithaca NY 14850




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pointed out in their attacks this simplicity of the French language and the strict rules of versification. They claimed that the rhyming alexandrines and the preference for abstractions turned what should be poetry into oratory. Often they have claimed there is no French poetry before Baudelaire, with the possible exception of Villon, in the fifteenth century. This attack diminished in the twentieth century when Eliot and Pound recognized Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Laforgue as genuine poets and models for their own writing.

Mr. Barzun discusses the French language ("a vowel language with difficult nasals"), the mute *e*, and the irrational spelling. Then, with admirable skill, he analyzes the rules of rhythm and rhyme. These three early chapters are justifiably based on the theory that the first major achievement of French verse was the neo-classical theater: the tragedies of Racine and the comedies of Molière.

When Louis XIV took over the government in the seventeenth century, France reached her maturity. The king centralized society around his palace at Versailles, and the theater became a permanent institution in France. The youthfulness and romantic idealism of Corneille's *Le Cid* (1636) and his tragedies of power were soon replaced by Racine's tragedies of the heart. Racine's alexandrines are both dramatic and harmonious. Mr. Barzun names him "the most obedient of the neo-classicists" and seems to agree with Robert Lowell who, when he translated *Phèdre*, called Racine "perhaps the greatest of French poets."

Some of the most brilliant pages in *An Essay* are on Molière and La Fontaine, the two masters of comedy. Their vocabulary is the richest of their century. Remorseless in his ridicule of *Les Femmes savantes*, lucidly analytical in *Le Misanthrope*, Molière paints a world of vain ideals, of cold hearts, and futile consolations. Englishmen usually love Molière and detest Racine. The liberties taken by Molière are also in La Fontaine whose *Fables* are miniature plays. He was not a naturalist but a poet, and he made of a humble literary genre one of the most finished examples of French classical art.

The eighteenth was a great century for prose (Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau) but a poor century for poetry. Mr. Barzun devotes few pages to it and passes quickly to the long spell of romanticism, and to its leader, Victor Hugo. From this point on—it is the mid-point of the book—the critic analyzes the theories and art of French poets during one hundred years, from approximately 1830 to 1930. Hugo, with his mastery of every form of verse (except the sonnet) was, according to Jacques Barzun, the liberator of democratic France and the greatest French poet. He did for poetry in France what Wordsworth did for it in England. Both poets brought changes to diction and subject matter. In the succeeding schools of Parnassian, symbolist, and surrealist poetry, there are traces of romanticism. These pages on Hugo and the information in the pages that follow will be valuable for today's students of French poetry. To illustrate Hugo's mastery of French versification, Mr. Barzun appended to *An Essay* the text and his translation of Hugo's *Les Djinns* (Evil spirits), taken from *Les Orientales*.

Musset, who is not favored by critics today, is treated generously by Mr. Barzun, who believes that the fluidity of Musset's lines and their ease and elegance are deceptive. Despair is the prevailing mood of the poems, which the critic sees as continuing the tradition of Marot in the sixteenth century, and even of Molière and La Fontaine in the seventeenth. Vigny, more solemn than Musset, was the stoic who in his strong poem, *La Mort du Loup*, believes man's duty is silent resignation in a world of evil.

Balzac died in 1850. About that time romanticism as a literary movement came to an end. It is true that Hugo continued to live and produce for more than thirty years longer. The school of romanticism had re-created French poetry. Its spirit was one of progress and change. It was therefore inevitable that the romantic ideal would be the stepping-stone for a first advance. This advance, whether it is called *le Parnasse*, or *le symbolisme*, or *le surréalisme*, is the subject of the last forty pages of the *Essay*.

For each of these changes or metamorphoses, Mr. Barzun finds admirable formulas and makes useful critical observations. Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* (1857) was outrageous by nineteenth-century standards, but today he is usually the first French poet the English and Americans read after Villon. His fifty prose poems, without meter or rhyme,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

describe an urban world. He translated the stories of Poe and called attention to the poetic theories of Poe, which the symbolists Mallarmé and Valéry drew upon. Rimbaud's *Illuminations* was the new contribution to the new genre of the prose poem, initiated by Aloysius Bertrand and Baudelaire.

Second in importance, after Hugo, is Mallarmé, who taught that a poem does not tell but suggests. Since his death in 1898, Mallarmé has influenced each generation of poets in England and America. His art is very exact and at the same time ambiguous. The precise meaning of a word in a Mallarmé sonnet is often to be found in the root or etymology of the word. Jacques Barzun reveals several examples of this practice, dear to Mallarmé and to his principal disciple, Paul Valéry.

Rimbaud, the most precocious and perhaps the most rebellious French poet, wrote his poems (such as *Le Bateau Ivre*), his prose poems *(Les Illuminations)*, and *Une Saison en enfer* (a spiritual autobiography) between the ages of sixteen and twenty. These writings are today considered as an important source of what is called "modernism."

One of the last-mentioned poets in *An Essay* is Guillaume Apollinaire who came midway between the two generations of the symbolists and the surrealists. The case of Rimbaud had somewhat fixed the portrait of the youthful poet as a vindictive, sullen, and even persecuted adolescent, hostile to family and state and religion. Apollinaire changed this portrait to that of a young man without family and country (he was born of a Polish mother and an Italian father), and without a sentiment of vindictiveness. His attitude was one of gratitude to France for receiving him (an attitude similar to that of many artists: Picasso, Picabia, Chagall, Giacometti), of constant gratitude to his family of friends.

*L'Esprit nouveau*, a lecture given by Apollinaire shortly before his death (1918) and published a month later in *Le Mercure de France*, is the synthesis of his major theories on poetry and the modern spirit in art. A sense of exuberance must preside over the new spirit, as well as a desire to explore everything, regions of the world and regions of the heart, to bring to every experience that critical sense and that common sense which the Frenchman believes he inherits at birth. The artist must never neglect the new popular forms of art—the cinema, for example, of which Apollinaire was a prophet.

Mr. Barzun's book makes it clear that modern poetry owes almost everything to Baudelaire. Mallarmé, as an admirer of Baudelaire, became the most studied symbolist of modern poetry. Rimbaud was the dazzled initiate and rebel. Apollinaire, without possessing the poetic genius of Mallarmé or Rimbaud, was able to bring poetry back from its Mallarmean hermeticism and Rimbaldian violence to tenderness and nostalgia, to the gentleness of the clown.

As a child Jacques Barzun knew Apollinaire. He sat on the poet's knee as Apollinaire talked with him and amused him. It is a delightful autobiographical remembrance that serves as a conclusion to a book written by a man who throughout his very active life as teacher, scholar, and critic has read and studied and loved French poetry.

## A Sly Don Called Ayer

THE MEANING OF LIFE. *By A. J. Ayer (with an introduction by Ted Honderich). Scribner's. $19.95.*

LKO #63

Reviewed by JIM HOLT

In 1988 the British philosopher A. J. Ayer underwent a "life-after-death" experience when his heart stopped for four minutes as a result of a piece of food blocking his windpipe. A year later he died of a respiratory ailment at the age of seventy-eight. In between he assembled for publication this collection of essays, lectures, and transcripts of broadcast discussions spanning the last four decades of his life. Among them are a public lecture he gave in London in 1988 entitled "The Meaning of Life" and a pair of articles he wrote for the popular press about the vision he had during his cardiac arrest and how it affected his views on the likelihood of an afterlife.

A. J. Ayer was, of course, the man who introduced logical positivism to the English-speaking world. He was also, it seems, the

JIM HOLT is a columnist for the *Literary Review* (London).



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man who introduced "the twist" to the Soviet Union. (In his memoirs he noted that the Russian youths who prevailed upon him to demonstrate the dance in a Moscow nightclub looked somewhat disappointed in the event.) At one point in his long career as a public philosopher he appeared on a BBC show called "Not So Much a Programme, More a Way of Life," as part of a quartet that included Eartha Kitt (Diotima?), answering questions about romantic love. Can one imagine Wittgenstein in similar circumstances?

Hardly. Ayer and Wittgenstein exemplified philosophical lives that were diametrical opposites. Wittgenstein was an intense, ascetic figure who was prone to suicidal depressions (as I write, a controversy rages in the correspondence column of the British journal *Nature* over whether he was actually schizophrenic). A man of consuming seriousness, he took philosophy as a religious vocation and was almost continuously tortured by its perplexities. Though much adored by his disciples, he was not an easy fellow to get along with.

"Freddie" Ayer, by contrast, was the most clubbable of philosophers, a paragon of cheer and healthy-mindedness, intense only when scoring points in a philosophical debate. He was not one given to voyaging alone through strange seas of thought. Common sense, quickness, and clarity were his virtues. Like his hero David Hume, he was easily able to abstract himself from philosophical perplexity to be sociable. He had many friends—among them George Orwell, Felix Frankfurter, E. E. Cummings, and John Cleese—with whom he stayed on excellent terms. He gave good parties. He was married four times, and apparently fancied himself a bit of a Lothario, judging from the candor with which he wrote about his many love affairs in his memoirs. His politics were left-libertarian; he was active in the Labour party, leading some to label him a "Margaux socialist." He was a star of the "Brains Trust" television show, and supposedly furnished the original for the hero of Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers*. Journalists occasionally singled him out as a corrupter of youth for his alleged hostility to religion and skepticism about morals. (A 1948 article in *Time* magazine suggested that his philosophical ideas had rendered young Oxonians receptive to fascism.) He was a keen and lifelong fan of the Tottenham Spurs football club, which he chose to root for because he liked the name; his taste for the sport, he said, was based not so much on aesthetics as on a craving for vicarious victory.

Alfred Jules Ayer was born in 1910 to a Dutch-Jewish mother and French-Swiss father. He was educated at Eton, where he was flogged by the young Lord Hailsham, and at Christ Church. In 1932, soon after his graduation, he went to Vienna; there Gilbert Ryle, who had been his tutor at Oxford, introduced him to members of the Vienna Circle—notably Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, and Moritz Schlick (who was later assassinated by a graduate student). The Vienna Circle was then at the peak of its activity, trying to flesh out what it took to be Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* philosophy in order to provide a foundation for scientific knowledge.

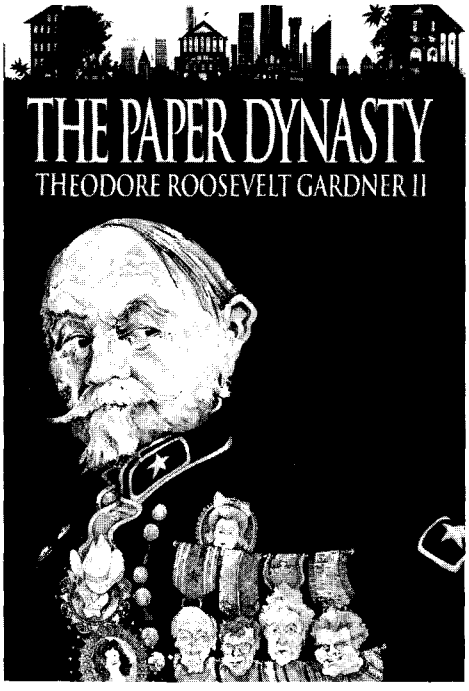
Ayer attended meetings of the Vienna Circle for several months. Returning to Oxford as a fellow of Christ Church, he soon achieved notoriety with the publication of *Language, Truth, and Logic* (1936), a lucid exposition of logical positivism that stressed its affinity with the native empiricist tradition, epitomized by David Hume and J. S. Mill. Composed when Ayer was only twenty-four, it is very much a young man's book: spirited, even belligerent in tone. Its strictures on metaphysical discourse scandalized some, enthralled others, and made Ayer very famous.

During the Second World War, Ayer served in the Welsh Guards and military intelligence. After the war he became the Grote Professor of Mind and Logic at University College, London. (Quipped George Orwell in a letter to Celia Kirwan: "You might ask Freddie for me, now that he has the chair in Mental philosophy, who has the chair in non-mental philosophy.") In his years there he transformed the department from an academic backwater into one of the most exciting centers of philosophy in the world. In 1959 Ayer was named Wykeham Professor of Logic at Oxford as a compromise candidate. He was knighted in 1970.

Ayer's philosophical career was in a sense a long epilogue to his first book. Unlike Wittgenstein, who radically altered his views on the nature of philosophy and language between his *Tractatus* (1922) and his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Ayer never really



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




cover art by Vint Lawrence

# If a picture is worth a thousand words ... ... why read?

## Some words are worth a thousand pictures.

Gardner's robust saga provides crackling entertainment...references to the Chandler family are scarcely veiled.[1] ...informative and spellbinding.[2] ...As much fun as a highminded gossip column.[3] ...if you like saga stories, and newspapers, don't miss this.[4] ...Outrageous metaphors ...massive and memorable characters...simply good reading.[5] ...vituperative attack on the Los Angeles Times newspaper and its founding family...an intriguing novel.[6] ...not very good.[7]

1. Publishers Weekly 2. St. Joseph, Missouri *News-Press/Gazette* 3. Los Angeles Copley's *Daily Breeze* 4. Oklahoma *Tribune Review* 5. *Idaho Press* 6. *Pasadena Star-News* 7. *Los Angeles Times*

The explosive story of the most remarkable family in America inspired THE PAPER DYNASTY. Ask for it at your favorite bookstore, or order from the publisher.

600 pages, $23.45
phone: (800) 777-7623, fax: (213) 544-3545

Orders shipped UPS within 24 hours.
Satisfaction guaranteed.

ALLEN A. KNOLL, PUBLISHERS, INC




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

changed his mind about anything fundamental, although he did become more flexible and tolerant toward other perspectives with age. In *Language, Truth, and Logic*, after all, he had purported to clear up every major philosophical difficulty; the first chapter is entitled "The Elimination of Metaphysics"; the last, "Solutions to Outstanding Philosophical Problems."

This great resolution, or rather dissolution, was accomplished by a pair of fairly simple distinctions: analytic vs. synthetic, and sense vs. nonsense. The first of these has been familiar since Kant. A proposition is called analytic if it is true by virtue of the meaning of its terms, for instance, "2 + 2 = 4" or "All bachelors are unmarried"; otherwise it is said to be synthetic. The second distinction arises from the so-called Verifiability Principle, the chief engine of the logical positivists, who claimed they got it from Wittgenstein. This principle says that a synthetic proposition possesses sense or significance only if it is subject to verification by experience; otherwise it is, strictly speaking, nonsense—or at best the mere expression of feeling. Using these two ideas, Ayer argued that philosophical pronouncements on metaphysics, morals, theology, and aesthetics were not so much erroneous as vacuous—like so many bubbles issuing from a fish's mouth.

Although logical positivism had an enormous influence on the world of Anglo-American philosophy when Ayer wrote *Language, Truth, and Logic*, it soon began to lose cachet. Two decades later, it was quite dead as a philosophical movement. In part this was owing to internal difficulties. The task of coming up with a formulation of the Verifiability Principle that would draw the line in the right way between metaphysical and factual propositions, for instance, proved exceedingly vexatious. The original statement of the principle seemed to dismiss historical statements as nonsensical, since no contemporary experience could confirm or falsify them; more sophisticated versions proposed by Ayer and others were vulnerable to Monty-Python-esque counter-examples like "The Absolute is lazy or the cat is on the mat."

The Verifiability Principle was also open to certain obvious objections from without. Wasn't it question-begging for the logical positivists simply to assert the principle as a criterion of meaningfulness and then use it to jettison metaphysics? And exactly what was the status of the principle itself? It did not seem to be analytic, nor could it be verified by experience; on its own terms, then, it ought to be spurned as nonsense.

What really put paid to logical positivism, though, was the emergence of Wittgenstein's "late" philosophy, which consisted in large measure of a rejection of his earlier ideas about the relation of language to the world—the very ideas on which the Vienna Circle had based its theory of knowledge and, in particular, the Verifiability Principle. The straightforward dichotomies of Ayer's brand of positivism were superseded by the more nebulous notions of "language games" and "forms of life." Ayer himself, like Bertrand Russell, never thought much of late Wittgenstein; his philosophical opponents would say he never "got it." Nor was he especially fond of the more technical direction philosophy was taking in America. Looking across the Channel, he took a dim view of existentialism, which he mockingly dismissed as arising from confusion over the verb "to be." (Sartre's reply: "Ayer est un con.") By mid-century Ayer was mostly occupying himself with classical problems in the theory of knowledge—perception, memory, and other minds—which he dealt with through linguistic analysis. (Later he undertook a series of expository books on such subjects as Voltaire, Thomas Paine, and the history of twentieth-century philosophy.) To many, his work seemed lacking in philosophical originality, an extended mopping-up operation from a long-forgotten war.

But Ayer did not repine. In the earliest essay of the present collection, "The Claims of Philosophy" (1947), he makes it quite clear that he was content to be a philosophical "journeyman" engaged in the business of clarification, rather than a "pontiff" who spouts "deeply significant nonsense." He elaborates on his view of what a model philosopher should do in "The Nature of Philosophical Inquiry," a trio of lectures given at Notre Dame in 1967. After discrediting a series of received ideals—the philosopher as general scientist, as seer into a deeper reality, as sage, as moral expert, as judge pronouncing on knowledge claims—he concludes that the proper activity of the philosopher is analysis, of which he distinguishes not fewer than eight



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

different varieties that he deems useful.

As for metaphysics, Ayer ventilates his positivist contempt for it in a 1949 BBC radio debate with the wily Jesuit, Frederick Copleston (who had earlier wrestled Bertrand Russell to a draw on the question of God's existence). When Father Copleston contends that the function of metaphysics is to open the mind to the transcendent, "to remove the ceiling of the room, as it were, the room being the world as amenable to scientific investigation," Ayer retorts: "My difficulty with your so-called transcendent statements is that their truth or falsehood doesn't, it seems to me, make the slightest difference to anything one experiences." Recognizing this as an application of the Verifiability Principle, Father Copleston makes the familiar objection that the principle assumes the very rejection of metaphysics it is supposed to argue for, and that in any case it is a bit of metaphysics itself. Ayer counters that it is rather a "persuasive" definition, challenging Father Copleston to adduce an alternative criterion of meaningfulness that sheds light on how his metaphysical propositions are to be understood.

Who won the eristic contest? One appraisal was offered by Wittgenstein as he listened to the broadcast with a friend. Copleston, he commented, "contributed nothing at all," whereas Ayer "has something to say, but he is incredibly shallow" (this from Ray Monk's recent biography of Wittgenstein). A rematch on the subject of free will was scheduled on Welsh TV some years later, but Ayer and Copleston were plied with so much drink while a malfunction in the recording equipment was being fixed that they were both incoherent by the time the debate commenced.

Elsewhere in this volume there is a good overview of Bertrand Russell's philosophical career, in which Ayer has laudatory things to say about his acknowledged master but finds rather a lot of embarrassingly obvious flaws in his theories; an article entitled "The Humanistic Outlook," which is mostly pablum; a brief essay on J. S. Mill as a social scientist; a chapter called "The Concept of Freedom," in which Ayer despairs of finding a definition of freedom that jibes with ordinary usage; and the transcript of a discussion Ayer had with a Scandinavian philosopher named Arne Naess on Dutch television in 1971, which is characterized by moments of high comedy and much mutual twitting (Naess: "Too fast, you're too fast." Ayer: "Yes, but I say a lot of things twice. . . .")

It is the final section of this volume, however, that one anticipates most keenly; it contains the title piece as well as Ayer's report on what he saw when he "went over to the other side." When, in the earlier essays, Ayer brings up the question of the meaning of life, he invariably pours cold water on it; that our lives should have some meaning larger than the particular ends we pursue is a logical impossibility, he submits, adding that only philosophical pontiffs would bother to look for one. Nor is this a cause for gloom, he says, since "it is not sensible to cry for what is logically impossible."

Did he change his mind about this issue in some fundamental way toward the end of his life? True to character, he did not. "The Meaning of Life" lecture amounts to a recapitulation of Ayer's familiar skeptical arguments concerning the existence of God and various notions of an afterlife—reincarnation, resurrection of the body, nirvana, and so on. It is elegant and often droll, but not terribly deep. The question of whether our lives could have any transcendent purpose is once again answered in the negative, though Ayer refuses to romanticize the point the way the existentialists used to do. Nor does he see any reason to fear personal extinction. The rational attitude toward death, in his opinion, is that which David Hume expressed when he remarked to Boswell that "he was no more uneasy to think that he should *not be* after his life, than that he *had not been* before he began to exist." Dr. Johnson thought Hume either mad or insincere for this; Ayer, who according to his friends faced his own imminent death with astonishing equanimity, was surely neither.

Less than a month after he delivered this lecture, a piece of smoked salmon that Ayer was eating went down the wrong way, his heart stopped, and he was briefly thrust into the Beyond—or so it seemed to him. He found himself confronted by a red light, "exceedingly bright, and also very painful. . . . I was aware that this light was responsible for the government of the universe." Among this being's ministers were two guardians of space; they had been lax in their duties, though, and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

consequently space was out of joint. Ayer felt it incumbent upon himself to put things right. Being familiar with Einstein's relativity, in which space and time form a seamless manifold, Ayer decided that the most efficient way to accomplish the task would be to operate on time. He tried to signal his intention to the guardians, waving his watch for symbolic effect, but failed to attract their attention. "I became more and more desperate," he recalls, "until the experience suddenly came to an end."

Could this have been the logical positivist's nightmare—sensory evidence for a divine order? Ayer quickly discounts the possibility, conjecturing, plausibly enough, that his brain had continued to function during his "death," giving rise to a delusory episode. "My recent experiences," he wrote, "have slightly weakened my conviction that my genuine death, which is due fairly soon, will be the end of me, though I continue to hope that it will be. They have not weakened my conviction that there is no god." In a postscript he amends this bold statement somewhat: "What I should have said . . . is that my experiences have weakened, not my belief that there is no life after death, but my inflexible attitude towards that belief"—a finely nuanced conclusion, to be sure, but not one that really belies an execrable limerick lately effaced from a bathroom in the Bodleian:

> There once was a sly don called Ayer,
> A chop-logic beyond compare.
> When vouchsafed a weird vision
> He rejoined with derision,
> "It's *still* stuff and nonsense, so there!"

## Part-time Titan

HENRY FIELDING: A BIOGRAPHY. *By Donald Thomas. St. Martin's. $19.95.*

Reviewed by BRUCE M. GANS

Henry Fielding's work radiates qualities nearly unique in literature—among them a sunny moral generosity and an understanding, reminiscent of Shakespeare, of everybody from aristocrats to street criminals. In Fielding the world lives in all its kinetic multiplicity, and his novels have a scope unsurpassed by his contemporaries. Suffusing these books, where only the prig, the hypocrite, and the brute are invited to leave, is the comic genius of an extraordinarily healthy heart.

One of the most interesting aspects of Donald Thomas's perceptive biography is how tragically and ironically Fielding's life differed from the common impression one forms of him on the basis of his masterpieces, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, and his lesser novels, *Jonathan Wild* and *Amelia*. Contrary to what one would assume from the achievement of Fielding's fiction, for example, Thomas makes it plain that Fielding was nearly as unaware as were his contemporaries that he was a titan of English letters. In his lifetime a writer fantastically inferior to him, Samuel Richardson, was much more highly esteemed. *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, in fact, were practically ignored by reviewers, despite their immediate large sales. *Tom Jones* was attacked as an incitement to sin and vice, for the novel's protagonist was a foundling and hence not the sort of person about whom respectable critics read—especially, as Thomas relates, in an age when it was customary to read novels aloud in a family circle where impressionable young girls might be present.

Fielding probably recognized the merits of his novels, but he didn't think of himself as chiefly a novelist and neither did his contemporaries. For the most part Fielding's interests were elsewhere, and most of his life's work is today completely forgotten or is of interest only to literary specialists of the period. As Thomas points out, "Few English writers were more involved in the public life of their times than Henry Fielding." Fielding was a lawyer, albeit one without a practice to speak of, and his lifelong dedication to social issues was a major reason he spent the last phase of his life as a magistrate for Westminster and Middlesex, where he established England's first police force and, as Thomas notes, did far more to eliminate crime and vice than those contemporaries who condemned his books as immoral.

Henry Fielding did not write with art's sake uppermost in his mind. Writing was primarily his weapon for fighting political and social

✪ BRUCE M. GANS is professor of English at Washington College in Chicago.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

battles of the moment as well as a means of making money and a reputation for himself. He was a prodigious author. He wrote plays and pamphlets and produced political journals. From January 1730 to June 1732, while in his mid-twenties, for example, Fielding had thirteen of his plays produced, a measure of success no contemporary playwright could match. His satires, farces, burlesques, and comedies were usually highly topical, lightly tossed off efforts, and so even his most popular plays are not remembered today.

The emphasis of Fielding's efforts is epitomized by the fate of his play *The Historical Register for 1736*. Now totally forgotten, it (along with his play *Pasquin*) so mocked the prime minister of England, Robert Walpole, that it helped inspire the Licensing Act of 1737, which required plays to be pre-approved by government censors. This law, in effect, ended Fielding's career as a dramatist, and so he turned to journalism and the novels for which he is remembered, in good part because there were no comparable restrictions for these genres.

Fielding also devoted far more of his life to political journalism, which is also unread today, than he did to his novels. As Thomas carefully establishes, Fielding's journalism can broadly be divided into two phases. In the first, Fielding continually attacked Prime Minister Robert Walpole for his corrupt administration, one that personally touched Fielding through his father, Edmund, who, like many of his fellow military officers as well as capable men in other departments of professional life, was denied advancement because he lacked the connections, pedigree, or money for bribes to procure it. The ferocity of Fielding's journalistic salvos created many influential enemies with a taste for vengeance. In his other political journalism, Fielding just as relentlessly attacked opponents of the national government who, headed by the Stuart Catholic, Prince Charles, opposed it with arms.

Thomas's picture of Fielding's era is one of his book's strengths. He shows the effects upon Fielding of witnessing a series of civil riots and the evolution of criminals into organized gangs. Fearing that the greatest threat to the social fabric now came not from political corruption at the top but from anarchy from below, Fielding became, in print, a vigorous defender of the government. Ironically, in his work as a magistrate, at which post he was a model of integrity, Fielding ultimately became the very agent of law and order.

Today Fielding's novels are read for their literary virtues, and not for Fielding's main reason for writing them, which was as a forum for his political and social views. *Jonathan Wild*, for instance, was a fictional biography of one of the most notorious criminal gang leaders of his day. But the novel was really meant as a thinly disguised attack on Robert Walpole; in it Fielding equated a Great Man of crime with the Great Man of English politics. *Amelia* was in part meant by Fielding as a tribute to his late wife, Charlotte Cradock. The novel was Fielding's means of exposing the abuses of both the penal and justice systems of his day, just as Dickens was later to do in *Little Dorrit*.

*Joseph Andrews*, like Fielding's shorter work "Shamela," was intended to ridicule the social and moral narrowness of Samuel Richardson and the admirers of *Pamela*. In Samuel Richardson's monumentally tedious and sanctimonious novel, the whole world is reduced to the household of the gentry and the sole problem life presents is whether a servant girl can fight off the amorous assaults of the young master and maintain her chastity outside marriage. This dense, suffocating work, wherein humor is an unknown part of life, delighted its original audience, which insisted upon novels that, as models of propriety, would above all provide a source of moral instruction to readers.

Fielding's views about human nature were strikingly modern, in fact they were rather close to Freud's. Furthermore, as Thomas points out, Fielding saw private sexual faults as insignificant compared to political questions. In *Tom Jones*, for example, Fielding has a character upbraid a curate by saying: "And is a wench having a bastard all your news doctor? I thought it might have been some public matter, something about the nation."

As Samuel Coleridge once observed, picking up a novel by Fielding after reading one by Richardson is like walking out of a sick room heated with stoves and onto a wide lawn on a breezy day. Recognizing this talent makes it even more tragic that Fielding had such little public acceptance and that Fielding's primary interest in public affairs kept



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him, a master of fiction, from dedicating himself to writing novels during the final years of his life. Having been appointed magistrate, Fielding, all but crippled by gout, spent long hours, day after day, hearing criminal cases. Often many of the accused had contracted contagious, fatal diseases while in jail, and they passed the illnesses along to the constables, judges, and jury members, who often died from them. In Fielding's few spare hours, he devoted himself to composing not fiction but sociological papers about how to improve social conditions and law enforcement.

Forced by his broken health to resign his post in April 1754, Fielding traveled to Portugal to seek physical rejuvenation. He was so ill he had to be carried aboard ship on a stretcher. Having lived to bury his first wife as well as most of his children and his three sisters, this most English of authors died in October 1754, six months after his arrival in Portugal, where he was buried. He was forty-seven years old. It was not the end one would have anticipated for a man who, Thomas tells us, in his youth so resembled the sunny and picaresque protagonist of *Tom Jones*.

Professor Thomas's biography is a full and even treatment of Fielding's life and work. The book's pace seems slow, but this is perhaps less attributable to its author than to its publisher who, presumably to save paper and bring out the book at a lower price, has seen fit to set the book in type best reserved for footnotes. Some of Thomas's judgments also seem arguable. For example, Thomas thinks that Fielding may have been heartless to have written the comedy *Joseph Andrews* while his wife was dying, even though Fielding was frenzied with grief after her death. Yet Fielding would not be the first person who found escape from his anxieties and grief through work. Thomas's opinion that *Jonathan Wild* is, in its formal qualities, Fielding's "most perfect" book is also disputable. So is his estimation of *Amelia*, Fielding's last novel. Thomas's evaluation is hardly uncritical, but he refrains from citing the novel's main defect, which is that it is a nearly stillborn book with characters who do not share two dimensions among them. Fielding, however, has a legitimate excuse for this failing. For by the time Fielding came to compose it, as Thomas points out, he had as much a right as any man to feel his spirit broken on life's wheel.

# Maps and Chaps

MY FRANCE: POLITICS, CULTURE, MYTH. *By Eugen Weber. Harvard University Press. $24.95.*

Reviewed by JOHN P. SISK

No one can write history without demonstrating how the historian should relate to his subject. One of the many good things about Eugen Weber's *My France* is that he tells us in an engaging autobiographical introduction what he thinks this relation should be. "The true historian," he says, must temporarily "join his characters, become a part of them, their mindset and their epoch." If sympathy may be too much to ask, "empathy is essential, not just looking at but 'feeling with' times, people, and ideas." We are never allowed to forget the importance of this empathy in the fifteen chapters that follow. In "The Second Republic and the Peasant," for instance, when the danger is that the local reality of the peasant will be sacrificed in order to see him and his preoccupations in nationalistic terms, we are warned again that history, being about people, "is incomplete when it fails to recognize this, or to situate its characters as fully as possible in space and time." Nor are we ever allowed to forget this caveat for historians of whatever stripe: though much of the best history is written from a particular point of view, the more thorough and conscientious the archival research, the easier it may be to forget the particularity of that view.

Such a historian will be suspicious of stereotypes, reductive theories, and grand abstractions that obscure or rule out important distinctions or vital details, but he will not shirk his archival homework. This is nowhere truer of Weber himself than in the chapter on folktales and fairy stories in their relation to everyday French life. Here the adversary approach is that of Bruno Bettelheim's *Uses of Enchantment*, which in the process of rising into the psychoanalytic stratosphere tends to

✪ JOHN P. SISK, Arnold Professor of the Humanities Emeritus at Gonzaga University, is the author of, most recently, *The Tyrannies of Virtue*. His essays and reviews have appeared in *Harper's*, the *Atlantic*, and other magazines.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# LSU Press

## The Mockingbird in the Gum Tree

### A Literary Gallimaufry

*Louis D. Rubin, Jr.*

"Louis Rubin is certainly one of the very best of our literary critics and these essays are vintage Rubin. They provide an excellent account of the state of American, and even more especially Southern, literature. The prose is bright and sharp and often witty. The judgements are sound and thoroughly pertinent. In short we have here solid common sense along with some fine flashes of brilliant uncommon sense. Both are much needed in our present badly confused time." —Cleanth Brooks

$24.95

## The Facts of Reconstruction

### Essays in Honor of John Hope Franklin

*Edited by Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, Jr.*

Thirty years after the publication of John Hope Franklin's influential essay *Reconstruction: After the Civil War*, ten distinguished historians have contributed to a new appraisal of Reconstruction scholarship. They address such issues as white intransigence and the role of violence in southern "redemption." In honor of a profound scholar and inspiring teacher, this book will provoke new discussion about "the facts of Reconstruction."

$29.95 cloth

$14.95 paper

## The Adaptable South

### Essays in Honor of George Brown Tindall

*Edited by Elizabeth Jacoway, Dan T. Carter, Lester C. Lamon, and Robert C. McMath, Jr.*

In *The Adaptable South*, eleven of George Brown Tindall's former students examine certain events and developments in the South since the Civil War, in the process touching on many of the themes emphasized in their mentor's work.

$35.00

## Shades of Gray

### Dispatches from the Modern South

*John Egerton*

"The essays in this collection are vintage Egerton. They reveal a writer with a sharp eye for the local scene and the individual experience, but one who is equally concerned with the broader context of regional and national life."—Dewey W. Grantham, Vanderbilt University

$24.95

## Reading Wagner

### A Study in the History of Ideas

*L. J. Rather*

L. J. Rather presents a wide-ranging meditation on the thought and writings of one of the principal intellects of the nineteenth century. He considers Wagner's works within their immediate intellectual and artistic milieu, and lays bare many misconceptions that have dominated Wagnerian criticism.

$35.00

***Louisiana State University Press***
***Baton Rouge 70893***




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

miss the concrete realities that gave the stories so much of their enduring appeal. If fairy stories and folktales are examined in the context of the time and place of those who heard or read them, it can be seen that they speak the language of everyday reality. This means that as perceptive a reader as Weber can confine his attention to these stories and in the process tell us a great deal about the cultural and political mutations of French life on all levels of society.

The same thing happens in the opening chapter that takes up the question whether the French are more authentically Gaulish or Frankish. Professor Weber enlightens us because he refuses to do what historiography has so often done: inscribe "present politics retrospectively onto its version of the past." Here the good historian, like the good storyteller, is careful to distinguish between present and past realities. Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, famous for its emphasis on its Gaulist connections, has its disturbing political reasons for not making this distinction. As Weber neatly puts it, "*Nos ancêtres* may be fading away, but in France the dead live longer than in other places." And as later chapters make clear, the longevity of the dead has a good deal to do with how quickly the barricades come up.

The jigsaw of historical reality, Weber says, tempts us to clarify it by choosing a single motif, which then "gets in the way of its completion or comprehension." Certainly the jigsaw of French history that most of us get in school has been so clarified that what we learn in chapter 3 ("In Search of the Hexagon") and chapter 5 ("Who Sang the *Marseillaise*?") is news indeed. In chapter 3 it is startling, at least for an American, to learn how geographically illiterate the French have been about the physical dimensions of their country. Until well into the nineteenth century there were no wall maps for patriotic teachers to point to; travel guides and railroad maps were strictly local; not until the eve of World War I did the looking at and deciphering of maps become a normal part of French experience.

Nineteenth-century history with its bias for the verbal showed only a restricted interest in images. "As we know," Weber observes ironically, "if geography is about maps, history is about chaps." No less a hindrance to the establishment of national sensibility was the fact that, late into the nineteenth century, "French was a foreign language for a large minority of the country's inhabitants." Clearly, chaps to be at home in their own country needed a common language as much as they needed maps. Hence, early in the Third Republic, instructors were urged to teach students the *Marseillaise* as a means of inculcating not only nationalist French sentiments but the French language itself.

One consequence of Weber's humanistic history with its wariness of stereotypes and grand abstractions is his practice of organizing chapters around key figures. Thus Baron Pierre de Coubertin, reinventor of the Olympic Games, becomes the vehicle for an account of organized sport in France. What may be most interesting to an American reader is the Nietzschean and elitist element in Coubertin's ideology and the resulting difference from the British attitude toward sport that is more familiar to Americans. In England "the practice of sports had become a method of social integration" not only for the ruling minority but for all levels of society. However, this was not possible in France where "the dominant ideology was not one of reconciliation but struggle," so that "athletic sports were condemned to social insignificance." Similarly, the concentration on the novelist and political activist Maurice Barrès proves to be a particularizing way to clarify fin de siècle French culture and politics—of special interest to the modern reader not only because of Barrès's cult of the self but because of his transition from rebellious individualism to organic collectivism.

A subsequent chapter demonstrates movingly how much one can learn about history by focusing on a particular historian—in this case Marc Bloch who served in both world wars and was killed by the Nazis in 1944, the crime of his Jewishness having been compounded by his work in the French Resistance. Weber's interest in Bloch cannot, of course, be separated from the kind of history that Bloch wrote: a history that did not employ grand academic abstractions as an escape from the jigsaw of everyday flesh and blood realities. At the same time, Bloch, an old-fashioned man of honor and a patriot in the most generous sense of the term, demonstrates in his own life how hard it is to separate the questions of how history should be



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

written and how life should be lived.

The capacity for empathy that Weber admires in Bloch and Jules Michelet (see Weber's splendid essay on the latter in the Winter 1991 AMERICAN SCHOLAR) inevitably results in a revisionism that is aimed not at shock appeal but at clarification. Thus Weber recounts his own discovery that to understand the integral nationalism of *Action française* he had to look beyond the accepted stereotypes to find "a more complex, nuanced, interesting picture." This is true also for the conventional distinction between left and right, and nothing but confusion comes from the assumption that either is monolithic. "The Jacobin vocabulary and Jacobin mystique," he writes, "can be found at both extreme left and extreme right." In his powerful chapter on anti-Semitism he will not allow the conventional comfort of locating it on the right, pointing out that at least in France "most of the great anti-Jewish works (great in size and impact, of course, not in content, which is largely a farrago of nonsense!) came from the left."

Here as elsewhere in the book what is particularly French has a much wider reference—thanks in part, no doubt, to the author's cosmopolitan background (born in Romania, he was educated in France and England and has taught in America for more than three decades). This wider reference is especially noteworthy in the last chapter, "What Revolution?" The answer to this question entails an examination of the stereotypes of revolution and counter-revolution, which have the same capacity to muddle thinking about present and past realities that *left* and *right* do. To distinguish them as positive and negative in relation to efforts to improve society is to fail to take into account the historical fact that counter-revolutionary regimes can adopt revolutionary ends, so that fascists have as much right to be called revolutionary as Jacobins and communists have. The problem, as Weber points out, is that since 1789 the belief that fundamental change is possible has made the idea of revolution an honorary fix-point in our social and political thinking. "What kind of revolution is there left to make," he wonders, "when all revolutionaries propose in the end to establish similar values?"

In his introduction, Professor Weber observes that he wishes to touch the non-specialist reader. In *My France* he does this without condescension and with the combination of wit, wide-ranging erudition, and common sense that we have come to expect from him. I suspect that he will also touch those specialists who have not forgotten that history is above all about people situated in space and time. No doubt some readers will complain about the inconvenient but now routine location of the notes (forty-six pages of them) at the back of the book. They may also complain that there is too much untranslated French. The important thing, however, is that the notes enrich the text and that the French is usually in clarifying contexts. Indeed, and especially if the reader has a dictionary handy, the book may do for him or her what the *Marseillaise* did for all those language-impoverished French schoolchildren.

## God Arrives

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN: THE DUTY OF GENIUS. *By Ray Monk. Free Press. $29.95.*

Reviewed by EVELYN TOYNTON

"Well, God has arrived," wrote John Maynard Keynes to his wife in January 1929. "I met him on the 5:15 train." The passenger to whom he referred was Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose godlike status among the Cambridge elite had been achieved, remarkably enough, while he was a mere undergraduate years earlier. Bertrand Russell described his young student as "perhaps the most perfect example I have ever known of genius as traditionally conceived, passionate, profound, intense, and dominating."

By the time he paid his visit to Keynes, Wittgenstein was also something of a deity in international philosophical circles. His *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, first published in an obscure journal in 1921, had turned philosophy on its head, redirecting its attention from the conceptions presented by language to the logical structure—and limits—of language itself. Inadvertently or not, Wittgenstein had

EVELYN TOYNTON's reviews have appeared in the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Washington Post Book World*, and other publications.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dealt a deathblow to metaphysics. Although Nietzsche had already evicted God from his Heaven, at the beginning of the century philosophers were still primarily concerned with the ethical and metaphysical issues raised by Kant and Hegel. Wittgenstein's radical departure from traditional philosophical methods revolutionized the discipline: If, as Whitehead said, all philosophy is but a footnote to Plato, then it is equally true that all analytical philosophy is but a footnote to Wittgenstein.

But obsessed as he was with his philosophical work, this exacting, difficult, tormented man kept struggling fiercely all his life to be something other than a mere god to intellectuals. More than anything, he believed that salvation lay in being a "decent," simple man, in performing humble and useful tasks. When Keynes picked him up at the train, Wittgenstein had just spent six years as an elementary school teacher in rural Austria, teaching peasant children to read and write. Sadly but perhaps predictably, this experience had proved disastrous. His pupils were alarmed by the stern intensity he brought to his task and feared the violence of his temper when they were slow to grasp a point. Their parents went from vague suspicion to open hostility toward the gloomy aristocrat living among them in poverty that was worse than their own. During his last posting, Wittgenstein was reported to the authorities for his brutal methods of punishment. In what he would come to regard as the most ignominious episode in his life, he lied to the court about the extent of his use of corporal punishment. So ashamed was he of this dishonesty that more than a decade later he made it the central point in a formal confession of his sins that he insisted on delivering to certain of his acquaintances. He also made a penitential journey to the village at this time, in order to apologize to the students whose ears he had boxed and hair he had pulled. He was not a man ever to forgive himself anything.

Wittgenstein's anguished lifelong battle to be "morally perfect," as much as his central importance to twentieth-century thought, has made him a legendary figure even to those who have never read his forbiddingly difficult works. Poetry and novels, music and paintings have been inspired by his life, just as his relatively small output has generated thousands of scholarly commentaries. (It was probably inevitable that this man who wanted his writings to make it unnecessary for anybody ever to write philosophy again—to "give philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself into question"—should have spawned a whole academic industry.)

One of the most impressive achievements of Ray Monk's new biography is that he succeeds in making clear "what the connections are between the spiritual and ethical preoccupations that dominate [Wittgenstein's] life and the seemingly remote philosophical questions that dominate his work." Put simply, it might be said that the fundamental connection is his quest for absolute honesty and simplicity. Even as he made it his life's work to strip philosophy of its abundant confusions—its logical sins—Wittgenstein struggled to divest himself of his abundant worldly possessions and worldly pride.

Ludwig Wittgenstein was born in 1889, the eighth and youngest child of an immensely rich and cultivated Austrian family who had converted from Judaism two generations earlier. Baptized a Catholic, raised in a vast marble palace in the Vienna of Freud and Klimt—one of his sisters was analyzed by the former and painted by the latter—his early life was dominated by his imperious father, a steel magnate who was the very model of the German paterfamilias. When he was still a boy, his two eldest brothers, driven to despair by Karl Wittgenstein's insistence that they learn to manage his industrial empire rather than pursue their artistic inclinations, committed suicide. (The eldest brother was evidently a musical genius, a true prodigy who began composing music at age four. Another brother, Paul, became a concert pianist, a career in which he continued even after he lost an arm in World War I. It was at his commission that Ravel wrote his famous Concerto for the Left Hand. Yet another brother committed suicide during World War I when his men refused to obey his orders.) Wittgenstein himself trained to be an engineer, but while doing aeronautical research in Manchester, he became interested in pure mathematics and went to study with Russell at Cambridge. It was Russell who first recognized his philosophical gifts, while fearing for his mental equilibrium:

> He used to come see me every evening at midnight, and pace up and down my room like a wild beast for



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

three hours in agitated silence. Once I said to him, "Are you thinking about logic or about your sins?" "Both," he replied, and continued his pacing. I did not like to suggest that it was time for bed, as it seemed probable both to him and me that on leaving me he would commit suicide.

Russell's confidence in his philosophical powers may literally have saved Wittgenstein from suicide at this juncture, since he was obsessed with the idea that the only justification for living was to produce a work of genius. This tenet, and others no less extreme, were garnered from *Sex and Character* by Otto Weininger, a Viennese Jew who identified Jews with moral weakness and lack of originality, a homosexual who declared all sexuality loathsome, and a suicide at age twenty-three whose death added immeasurably to the fame of his book. Oddly, Wittgenstein seems not to have noticed any contradiction between the Weiningerian imperative of genius and his own passionate belief in the primary importance of "decency."

Having received from Russell the encouragement he so desperately sought, Wittgenstein abruptly fled the academic atmosphere of Cambridge, something he would do repeatedly throughout his life, in order to get down to serious philosophical work. On this occasion, he went to a remote village in Norway, over Russell's objections: "I said it would be dark, & he said he hated daylight," Russell wrote to a friend. "I said it would be lonely, & he said he prostituted his mind talking to intelligent people. I said he was mad & he said God preserve him from sanity. (God certainly will.)" It was in Norway, in October 1913, that he began work on the *Tractatus*, the only book he would publish in his lifetime. He carried the manuscript with him throughout his service in the Austrian army during World War I and completed it in an Italian prison camp, although it was not until 1922 that he managed, with the generous help of Russell (from whom he was by then estranged), to get it published in book form.

Monk does an extraordinary job of explicating the terse and enigmatic propositions of the *Tractatus* in a way that illuminates Wittgenstein's assertion that "the point of the book is ethical." Tracing the mystical propositions about the soul and the meaning of life in the

A groundbreaking look at the ways in which late-19th-century England confronted and addressed the problems of poverty

**Gertrude Himmelfarb**

**POVERTY AND COMPASSION**

THE MORAL IMAGINATION OF THE LATE VICTORIANS

**"A monumental achievement**

...it provides more evidence that Gertrude Himmelfarb is one of America's great historians" —CHARLES MURRAY, Wall St. Journal

Just published by Knopf



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

last sections of the book—which seem to stand in stark contrast to its investigation of logical structure—to Wittgenstein's nearness to death during the war, he also points out their connection to the rest of the book's central distinction between saying and showing. Later, Wittgenstein would be furious over what he saw as the book's willful misappropriation by anti-metaphysicians, such as the logical positivists, who interpreted his work to mean that only verifiable propositions were meaningful, when he had meant precisely the opposite: only those things that could not be meaningfully spoken about—that is, the metaphysical—had true value. Finally, in a recantation unique in philosophy, Wittgenstein would repudiate the book altogether, abandoning the notion of providing a final, definitive account of the logical structure of language. Instead, in writings that would be published posthumously as *Philosophical Investigations,* he turned his attention to the more fluid and provisional meanings that language takes on in ordinary discourse—"the stream of life."

Wittgenstein's war service forms another part of his legend: exempt from conscription because of a double hernia, he enlisted as a volunteer and lobbied to be sent to the front. Once there, he demanded the most dangerous post, in which he served with conspicuous bravery. When a relative with connections in the Vatican arranged for his early release from the prisoner-of-war camp, he indignantly refused to leave.

At the war's end, Wittgenstein returned to Vienna to find himself one of the richest men in Europe, most of the family's money having been transferred to America by his canny father before his death. (The Wittgensteins were so rich that after the Anschluss, when two of Ludwig's sisters couldn't bring themselves to leave Austria, the Nazis were persuaded to grant them Aryan status in exchange for the moneys they had in Switzerland alone.) Before embarking on his career as a schoolteacher, Wittgenstein gave away his entire share of the family fortune and for the rest of his life lived a completely ascetic existence.

As Monk makes clear, these acts must be understood in the light of his quest for personal purity and honor, rather than as signs of pure patriotism or philanthropy. "Now I have the chance to be a decent human being," he wrote in his journal while at the front, "for I'm standing face to face with death. . . . Perhaps the nearness of death will bring light into life." By the same token, it is notable that he gave away his millions not to the countless impoverished Austrians, many of them fellow veterans, who were struggling to survive amid the country's post-war devastation, but to his already rich siblings. It was his own suicidal misery at this time that he sought to allay, not the suffering around him.

Such solipsism marked all of Wittgenstein's moral struggles, and in some sense doomed them. Typically, when he made his formal confession of his sins—including not only the sin of lying about his treatment of his pupils, but also that of having concealed his Jewish roots out of Weiningerian anti-Semitism—he demanded that his chosen confessors hear his recitation immediately, no matter how inconvenient it might be for them. And while any show of snobbery or injustice or even normal competitiveness made him savagely indignant, his own behavior was often impatient and harshly critical, something for which he endlessly castigated himself after the fact.

Wittgenstein's very passion for honesty made him a nearly impossible person to have around. Intolerant as he was of all types of sham, he could not bear to engage in ordinary pleasantries, and he would meticulously dissect the most casual utterance to uncover the wrong assumptions behind it. At the same time, he was ferociously self-absorbed and sensitive to any hint of rejection. It is both sad and comic to read of how even his most fervent admirers—Russell and G. E. Moore and Keynes among them—groaned at the prospect of being subjected to his exhausting presence and his relentless analyses of philosophical problems. (Perhaps they would have found him easier to be with if they had discussed his two favorite diversions, Hollywood movies and hard-boiled American detective stories.)

Wittgenstein's most satisfactory relationships seem to have been with the sort of people he wanted most to be like—simple, unpretentious working folk—and with his numerous Cambridge disciples. These were usually gentle, high-minded young scholarship students (that is, not the sort of upper-class Englishmen who constituted the greater part of the Cambridge population) who were willing to subject themselves to all his moral



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strictures and who, in return, elicited a sort of paternal sympathy and concern from him. In the thirties, one of these young men, the meekly adoring Francis Skinner, became his lover for many years. Skinner's family always believed that Wittgenstein's insistence that Francis take up "useful" labor in a factory contributed to his early death. (Wittgenstein urged all his disciples to learn practical skills rather than pursue academic careers, which he felt would only make it difficult for them to do honest philosophical work. He himself worked as a gardener for a while, investigated the possibility of becoming a doctor or a manual laborer in Russia, and during World War II, after failing to obtain work as an ambulance driver, left his hated teaching job at Cambridge to serve as a porter in a London hospital.)

That Wittgenstein was primarily homosexual is not in dispute. What *have* been disputed are the nature and extent of his sexual involvement. In a direct expression of opinion rare in this book, whose author tends to remain almost heroically unobtrusive, Monk convincingly refutes W. W. Bartley III's allegations of Wittgenstein's promiscuity. It is his contention that the diary entries Bartley offers in proof are self-chastisements for impure thoughts rather than for actual conduct. Monk also takes issue with those who have claimed that Wittgenstein suffered from specifically homosexual guilt. Rather, as he sees it, Wittgenstein could not reconcile any type of sexual behavior with his exalted notions of what love should be. To cite Weininger for these particular views seems unnecessary; they are perfectly in keeping with Wittgenstein's fanatical obsession with purity in general. (There seems something particularly German about this, just as his relentless severity with both himself and others seems more than a little reminiscent of his sternly Germanic father.)

It is clear from Monk's sympathetic but judicious account that if Wittgenstein's painful loneliness was only rarely relieved, his own difficult character was largely to blame. His over-sensitivity and morbid self-obsession, as well as his conflicted feelings about physical love, made him as difficult a lover as he was a colleague. Only toward the end of his life—he died of cancer in 1951, at the age of sixty-two—in love with a young man nearly forty years his junior, did he finally have the revelation that comes to so many lesser intellects in adolescence: "It is the mark of a *true* love that one thinks of what the other person suffers. For he suffers too, is also a poor devil."

But if Wittgenstein never achieved the saint-like humility he sought, there was nonetheless something profoundly religious about his passionate, ascetic dedication to his moral and intellectual struggles. When one thinks of the intellectuals portrayed in Paul Johnson's book of that name, with their grandiose plans for ridding the world of unselfishness and their often monstrously selfish behavior, one may reflect that there are few other figures in recent intellectual life whose sins seem less despicable, or who were so free of the besetting vice of self-righteousness. A saint tormented by intellect, an intellectual tormented by the struggle for sainthood, he might have been a fitting subject for his beloved Dostoyevski. There is a fierce abstract beauty to Wittgenstein's life that, however different from what he wanted it to be, is impossible to contemplate without awe.

***Women's Studies in Religion***

A Master's Degree Program

- an active feminist community
- interdisciplinary emphasis
- extensive range of courses
- highly regarded faculty
- intense faculty-student cooperation
- can serve as the foundation for the internationally-recognized Claremont Graduate School Ph.D. Program in Religion

For more information, contact Professor Karen Torjesen, Director of Women's Studies in Religion Program, at:
Religion Program
The Claremont Graduate School
831 N. Dartmouth Avenue
Claremont, CA 91711
Telephone: (714) 621-8000, extension 3214

The Claremont Graduate School



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# *The Reader Replies . . . . . .*

## The Sleep of Reason

Probably no well-known contemporary author has suffered more than Thomas Szasz from being attacked by critics who either have not read his work at all or have not read it carefully. A case in point is David Gutmann's review-essay of *Madness in the Streets: How Psychiatry and the Law Abandoned the Mentally Ill* by Rael Jean Isaac and Virginia C. Armat, which appeared in the Summer 1991 SCHOLAR. His second paragraph charges that "rogue psychiatrists" like Szasz (bracketing him with his polar opposite, the flaky Ronald Laing) played a key role in de-institutionalizing the "mentally ill." Although Gutmann says that this paragraph is a summary of the book he is reviewing, by implication, at least, he concurs with Isaac and Armat—its authors—in blaming Szasz for the plight of the homeless on our streets.

However, Szasz was one of the earliest writers to *attack* the wholesale release of mental patients from the only home they had. De-institutionalization is currently a psychiatric fad, in his view. To be sure, he believed that the forced institutionalizing of human beings in the name of psychiatric care was a "shame"; however, he characterizes de-institutionalizing them in the name of psychiatric progress as a "sham."

Arguing that "mental illness" is a myth has never, for him, been the same thing as failing to recognize that there are people who, for whatever reason, either cannot or will not cope with the demands of everyday life. But he sees this inability as part of the human tragedy, not a "sickness" that can be treated like the pathologies assailing the body. "Some persons—because they are fearful, weak, or lazy—want to drop out of society; others—because they are ineffectual, odd, or offensive—are dropped out of it."

For years Szasz has been asking the public as well as the medical and legal professions to face "brutal facts of the human destiny: namely, that not everyone can 'make it' in life; that those who cannot are not sick; and that a free society cannot afford to regard as 'insane' or 'irresponsible' either those who wish to escape from their responsibilities because they find society too demanding or those whom society wishes to expel because it finds them too demanding."

Pointing out that America's state mental "hospitals" are not, and never have been, *hospitals*, but rather the "natural habitat of people who have either escaped from society or been expelled from it," Szasz argued that they functioned mainly as "homes for the homeless," for those who have "no place of their own and none where they are welcome." A corollary of this fact is that most people in mental hospitals are "socially disabled"; hence they cannot simply be discharged. Moreover, many of them have "come to like it in the institution—which provides them not only with room and board but also with an escape from the day-to-day responsibilities of ordinary life." These "patients" do not need doctors' care, but an asylum, which could best be provided for them if the institution in which they are housed were de-medicalized. However, just as years ago they were incarcerated against their will, now they are being evicted against their will. They are "not given a choice between staying in the institutions that have become their homes or moving into broken-down hotels in the slums. In the name of doing something good *for* mental patients, once more something terrible is being done *to* them."

These passages from the writings of Thomas Szasz are from three of his essays: "State Mental Hospitals: Orphanages for Adults" (1978), "Back Wards to Back Streets" (1980), and "The Lady in the Box" (1982). All three were reprinted in his book *The Therapeutic State: Psychiatry in the Mirror of Current Events* (Prometheus Books, 1984). It seems perverse to blame Szasz for a situation whose pathos he recognized fifteen years ago and began attacking with the same impeccable logic, mordant wit, and stylistic elegance he had already displayed in demonstrating that mental "illness" is a myth. And while Gutmann does not quite subscribe to this position, he sensibly closes his essay by pointing out the fallacies in the currently popular idea (promoted by E. Fuller Torrey and shared by Isaac and Armat) that "bad genes" account for disordered minds or neurotic symptoms.

M. E. GRENANDER
East Berne, New York

David Gutmann's review-essay, "The Sleep of Reason," seeks to blame liberal intellectuals for the de-institutionalization of the insane that created the current homeless crisis. This is a bum rap.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dr. Gutmann is oblivious to the political events that led to the closing of the asylums. He seems unable to differentiate between theory and public policy. Why are none of his villains politicians?

For instance, in California the shift to community care happened under Governor Ronald Reagan. Perhaps Reagan was a secret follower of R. D. Laing, but it is more likely that he closed asylums to cut the state budget while well-meaning advocates of community care unwittingly provided his conservative administration with political cover. State institutions were closed without the prior implementation of a system of community care. Community care failed because it did not exist in the first place. What community care we have now was created in response to a public health crisis, not in anticipation of the needs of patients released years ago. The California experience has been replayed in state after state and not because of the writings of Thomas Szasz.

Nor does Dr. Gutmann mention the factual reasons why the asylums fell under attack. He seems to believe that an ideal system for caring for the insane existed prior to the perfidious sixties. But what about the lobotomies, gratuitous shock treatments, over-drugging, and the patients who were left to rot in hospitals that performed de facto incarceration without due process of any sort? Dr. Gutmann does not mention one responsible voice that spoke out against these abuses. Special scorn is reserved for anyone who advocates for the insane or suggests that they are entitled to civil rights beyond what an omniscient psychiatrist is willing to grant.

"The Sleep of Reason" ends with a lengthy quotation that excoriates intellectuals as woolly-minded conformists and reminds all sensible people to be highly suspicious of any advice that intellectuals have to offer. Perhaps this is a sound assessment. But are we to be unquestioning when a doctor dictates the proper and just relationship between the state and its insane citizens? Are doctors the only ones who are qualified to define this relationship? There is more at stake than the correct therapeutic agenda.

MATTHEW FELIX
Napa, California

David Gutmann's review in the Summer 1991 issue of *Madness in the Streets*, and presumably the book itself, fails to address the kernel of fact that the anti-psychiatrists distort to the point of absurdity: that man is a social animal. Yes, quoting Gutmann, "... the human psyche is a system in its own right," and is "... in some part responsible for its troubles" (and also for its accomplishments). But it does not function in a vacuum. It exists in, interacts with, and indeed cannot survive apart from, a social context (Gutmann's "ambient society"). And the beliefs, mores, customs, and practices of the society affect and shape the mental (and physical) states of its constituents. Certainly this relationship (anatomized by Fromm and others) bears upon the central issue of the book.

It should also be noted that the radicals did not de-institutionalize the mentally ill; the American taxpayer did: vide Proposition 13; the Reagan Revolution; the millstone effect of the liberal label in the 1988 presidential election. Szasz and Laing, et al. (to the extent that they were heard at all) were merely ratifying a nation-wide consensus for public neglect that, far from singling out the mentally ill, was (and is) extended indiscriminately to all categories of the needy and the helpless. While successive budgets reduce the amount of money thrown at the problems of these constituencies, one public endeavor remains a growth industry: the construction of a system of prisons second to none.

RICHARD LIETO
Point Pleasant, New Jersey

Thank you for that review of *Madness* in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. I was the more pleased in that the reviewer clearly does not share my view of the nature of mental illness, and nonetheless liked the book. By the way, I agree with him in so far as I think many of the mentally ill (at least when their illness is not in its acute phase) can shape their fate to some degree, in the same way that cancer or diabetes patients can behave quite variously in reaction to their illnesses—deny or accept them, try to make life easier or hellish for those around them, etc., etc. The value of the community programs like Thresholds (which both Dr. Gutmann and I mention) is that they motivate and guide patients in making the best of their situation, helping them to shape their lives in ways that will be productive. I don't think it's correct, as Gutmann does, in his effort to show where "biologizing behavior" leads, to lump the major mental illnesses with alcoholism or drug addiction. In the latter two, by avoiding the substance you avoid the illness; the same is not true of schizophrenia and manic-depressive psychosis.

RAEL JEAN ISAAC
Irvington, New York

David Gutmann's superb review of *Madness in the Streets* that appeared in the Summer 1991 issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR is the best analysis I have seen of how psychiatry got into its present mess. I commend him for speaking out so eloquently in defense of clinical experience of professional judgment, qualities which are now almost universally disregarded.

American psychiatry (organizationally and individually) has turned out to be a mighty slender reed bowing, bending, and breaking before the concerted onslaught of sociologists and libertarians, lawyers and others. Dr. Winfred Overholser was



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

actually flattered when Goffman acknowledged his permission to use St. Elizabeth's Hospital as his "laboratory." The superintendent of the Oregon Psychiatric Hospital was equally flattered when he permitted *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* to be filmed on his wards. He was even given a small part in the film!

In Washington, where I practice, I have been particularly impressed by the role of lawyers in abetting the current debacle. Although lawyers, by themselves, are not the sole cause of our troubles, they invariably intimidate psychiatrists—most of whom do not have the courage to stand up for their professional convictions.

ZIGMOND M. LEBENSOHN, M.D.
Washington, D.C.

**DAVID GUTMANN replies:** Professor Grenander is right: I read Thomas Szasz a long time ago, and not as carefully as he did. Having received—I thought—the central message, and having been put off by it, I did not bother to read Szasz's essays and other marginalia. So I didn't know that he was against the move to wholesale de-institutionalization, and I am beholden to Professor Grenander for this correction. However, while Szasz's position turns out to be more complex than I gave him credit for, the fact remains that his major contention—that there is no such thing as mental illness—was used by activists to support a position more simplistic than his own: It is not individuals, but society that is sick; and asylums are not designed to remedy individual pathology, but are themselves symptoms of the social disease. If Professor Grenander is right, then Szasz's writings were recruited, finally, to serve ends that he himself neither intended nor approved.

Mr. Felix and Mr. Lieto remind me that it was not left-wing social scientists alone who closed down the asylums. They rightly point out that right-wing budget cutters in league with conservative taxpayers also played a considerable part in bringing about de-institutionalization. Of course; but while both the right and the left collaborated, each in its own way, in erasing state hospital systems, it was the liberal social scientists who bear chief responsibility for the ex-patients' subsequent extramural fate, particularly in the community mental health clinics that had been set up to receive the refugees from the back wards. Contrary to the assertions of Lieto and Felix, the flow of money into state mental health systems did not end with the closing down of inpatient services; instead, such funds were diverted to the system of outpatient clinics, halfway houses, and day hospitals—and it was through their ideological influence over the personnel of these agencies that the liberal social scientists exercised their greatest power and had their most disastrous impact. As I thought that I indicated in my review, I am certainly no advocate of back wards, and I stated that de-institutionalization might have worked if the ex-patients had been met by dedicated, trained *professionals*. But instead, they were met by a mix of street people, self-elected "people's representatives," and well-meaning student interns marinated in the belief that love *is* enough. It was the community mental health movement, and not the right wing, that set the direction of the new outpatient facilities; it was they and not conservative budget cutters who staffed these clinics with puff-heads chosen for their ideology, their "street authenticity" rather than their hard-won professional skills. After all, if the mental patient is not "sick," but is the victim of a sick society, then his healing will be brought about through exposure to corrective politics, rather than politically incorrect psychotherapy. Thus, a psychiatrist friend of mine, active during the early seventies in the community mental health movement, recently told me that he gave a significant chunk of the grant monies at his disposal to a black street gang, because he judged them to be the authentic tribunes of their people. I am glad to see that Dr. Lebensohn seconds my view: namely, that the loss of the professional attitude in dealing with the mentally ill probably had a more disastrous impact than budgetary reductions or the loss of particular brick and concrete settings.

Mr. Lieto also takes me to task for insisting that the psyche is an entity in its own right, and that it exists in partial independence of the social forces that helped to shape it. He reminds us that the psyche "exists in, interacts with, and indeed cannot survive apart from a social context." Right on; but not the whole story. To give a physiological example, our lungs imply the ambient atmosphere of oxygen; and the conformation of our lungs reflects the life-sustaining properties of oxygen. Nevertheless, if lungs did not maintain their own particular properties, we would immediately lose all access to the life-giving properties of oxygen. Similarly, if the psyche loses its particular structures and functions—as is the case in schizophrenia—we lose access to the psychologically beneficial qualities of the social environment. When our lungs fail, large quantities of unpolluted air are no help. In that emergency, we need the Pros from Dover: the surgeons and diagnosticians who know where and how to intervene in the pulmonary system. Likewise, when psychosis or depression cuts us off from our social "air," objective improvements in our socio-economic circumstances will have little or no effect; at that critical point we need trained professionals who know how to intervene in the psychological system itself. They do this via the special and intense relationship that is—let us hope—established between the therapist and the patient. Patients must first learn to tolerate intimacy with the special person of the therapist before they can



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

take on the larger community, or the demands of participatory democracy. But—getting back to the already over-strained environmental metaphor—the community mental health ideologues thought that it was enough to improve—via radical activism—the quality of the social air; and that the diseased psychic "lungs" would then heal by themselves. They were—and still are—terribly wrong.

I do agree with Rael Jean Isaac that the predispositions to certain severe mental illnesses—notably, some schizophrenias and the bipolar depressions—have a biological base. It would be silly to dispute that point; I only objected to the current fashion, which is to seek genetic—and usually irreversible—bases for *all* psychological disorders. Writing as a psychologist, I argued against the growing tendency to deconstruct personality into its social or biological antecedents, so that individuals become nothing more than the victims of cultural or biological forces over which they have no control. I countered that personality, as a system in its own right, can—for its own reasons—conjure up *reversible* problems. If the psyche can create its own woe, then by the same token it has the power, given appropriate help, to undo that trouble.

This more hopeful view is borne out by our daily experience, as clinicians. True, we do encounter patients whose mood swings reflect some timing of their cells, and these can only be corrected with medication. But depression is a febrile disease, and like any fever it can have reversible as well as irreversible causes. A fever can be caused by a fatal lymphoma or by a self-limiting virus; by the same token, certain depressions—particularly, those of the bipolar variety—are rooted in the genes, while others are symptoms of exclusively psychological conflicts. The latter class of depressive symptoms can be reversed by purely psychological interventions, aimed at bringing the conflicts to light, and strengthening the ego in its attempts at conflict resolution. Again, this is no work for social activists, or for pill pushers; it is a work for trained professional psychiatrists and psychologists, preferably those who have themselves been patients in psychotherapy.

## Commencement at Duke

George F. Will's trenchant discussion, in his "Commencement at Duke" (Autumn 1991), of campus problems and promises, notably "political correctness" and the literators' agony over the canon, results in some pithy, penetrating apothegms and aphorisms. Since so few academics mount platforms to defend tradition, I wonder if I might offer what appears to be an oversight in all the proliferating discussion.

An inchoate assumption in most discussions of the canon I have read is this: *Unless* works are assigned and required to be read and studied during undergraduate courses, these will (may) *never* be read. The curriculum is faculty-determined and if the opportunity to require reading is not made mandatory, it will be lost—forever. What a castigation of themselves (faculty literators), their colleagues in politically correct courses elsewhere in the university, the annointed authors selected, and, above all, their students' perspicacity!

Will writes: "Not all value judgments are political judgments." True. And he might have added more precisely, "Many judgments, statements of fact, theories and careful observations have no relevance to political actions at all," a matter of some moment in the "discussion" of PC. At seventy-two, I look back on an academic career during which the teaching of logic (thirty years) held a central place for me and my students. Mathematical logic, Boolean algebra, formal logic, even elementary Aristotelian logic are hardly "political" and only by a perverse insistence on a view, in Will's phrase, from inside " . . . the clean, well-lit prison of one idea . . ." can they be warped into some insidious, political legerdemain.

Plato believed (and taught) that education was a drawing out from the human mind of intellectual realizations only slowly, gradually educed. The process was lifelong and largely self-motivated. A gradual winnowing reduced the great unwashed to the surviving, saving few, as Will reminds us. Unless we make the student hungry for learning enough to self-start him for the rest of his life, universities will have failed in their primary aim. That aim is emphatically not a political agenda. It never has been.

ALLAN SHIELDS
Professor of Philosophy Emeritus
San Diego State University

## T. E. Lawrence

Aristides is always funny and usually also perceptive, as in most of his piece on heroes, "Knocking on Three, Winston" (Summer 1991 AMERICAN SCHOLAR). That T. E. Lawrence "is perhaps too meshuga" is both funny and correct, the more so because, depending on how it is said, that can mean either (affectionately) a little crazy or (scornfully) completely mad. Just how does he say it?

However, he slipped up on Lawrence's "apparently wretched translation of the *Iliad*." "Apparently" confirms that he has never read Lawrence's translation of the *Odyssey* and relied solely on Max Beerbohm's fatuous remark. Had he read it, he might prefer C. M. Bowra's judgment that it is "by far the best translation of Homer into English" (as of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1933); Irving Howe's, that it is "firm, often pungent English prose—some classicists have balked, but it is a living book"; or Robert Fagles's, that "Lawrence's burly, combative prose finally gives Homer a compelling stature."

HAROLD ORLANS
Chevy Chase, Maryland

**ARISTIDES replies:** I am pleased to be able to report to Harold Orlans that I meant my use of *meshuga* in describing T. E. Lawrence to be affectionate.

I am less pleased to report that Mr. Orlans has rightly nailed me to my give-away use of the word "apparently" in describing Lawrence's translation of the *Odyssey*. Painful truth to tell, I had not read Lawrence's translation, but I was enraptured by Max Beerbohm's devastating remark about it, which I couldn't resist quoting. Painfuller still to tell, I have no Greek, and so cannot report on the faithfulness of the Lawrence translation. What I can report, having now acquired a copy of that translation, is that it is indeed a powerful and admirably flowing prose composition. This being so, perhaps I ought to amend Max Beerbohm's remark to read, in my case, that I had rather have written this translation than have led the Arab revolt. Apologies to T. E. Lawrence and to Harold Orlans.

## Editors' Note

The style of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR has recently been challenged with regard to its use of the words *homosexual, lesbian,* and *gay*. The challenge appeared in an article in the journal *Gay Community News* (July 21–27, 1991), written by a recent contributor to these pages, Edward Stein, who, in his article, argued that the editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR is opposed to using the words *lesbian* and *gay,* preferring to use in their stead the word *homosexual*; and, further, that he is contradictory, and hence illogical, in this preference. Such, in brief compass, is the argument of Mr. Stein's article. Rather than attempt to refute that article, perhaps the best thing to do is to set out the policy of our journal about these by-now supercharged words.

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR has no argument against the word *lesbian* and, so far as is known, has always used it when the occasion required. It has no argument with the word *gay* either, believing that any group may call itself what it pleases. The SCHOLAR does prefer to continue to use the more traditional word *homosexual,* however: first because it is more traditional, and second because the word *gay* seems just now the more volatile of the two words.

To make plain how volatile language that is in the flux of social and political controversy can become, only this past summer a militant group in the gay liberation movement announced, by way of an article in the *New York Times,* that it preferred homosexuals be called "queer." And lesbians, we have been instructed by an officer of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, Inc., prefer not to be referred to as "gay women" because: "Historically, lesbians have suffered a double invisibility as gay people and as women. Conscious reference to 'lesbians' and 'gays' is one of the ways to stress the equality and independence of women within the community." We would make no further comment about any of this except to note the obvious—namely, that this is all very tricky terrain.

As an intellectual magazine with scholarly interests, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR reserves the right not only to choose its own style, where that style is not detrimental to the feelings or aspirations of any group, and to remain just a bit behind the current fashion where sense seems to warrant doing so. At the same time that our preference remains for, in our view, the more neutral word *homosexual*—and, let it be noted, there are those in the gay liberation movement who would not agree that the word *homosexual* is neutral, arguing that it has terrible historical resonances—we also respect the rights of all minorities to be called what they wish to be called. Therefore, if a contributor to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR wishes to use the word *gay* in an article or book review in our pages, the editors would not stand in the way of his or her doing so.

We would add that, in the case of Edward Stein's own contribution to our pages, a review that he wrote with a colleague of a book entitled *Homosexuality: A Philosophical Inquiry* by Michael Ruse (AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Spring 1991, pp. 315–320), we did not finally stand in his way, and, after reasoned argument, the authors carried their case, the editors gave way, and the review appeared with the word *gay* where the authors wished it to be.



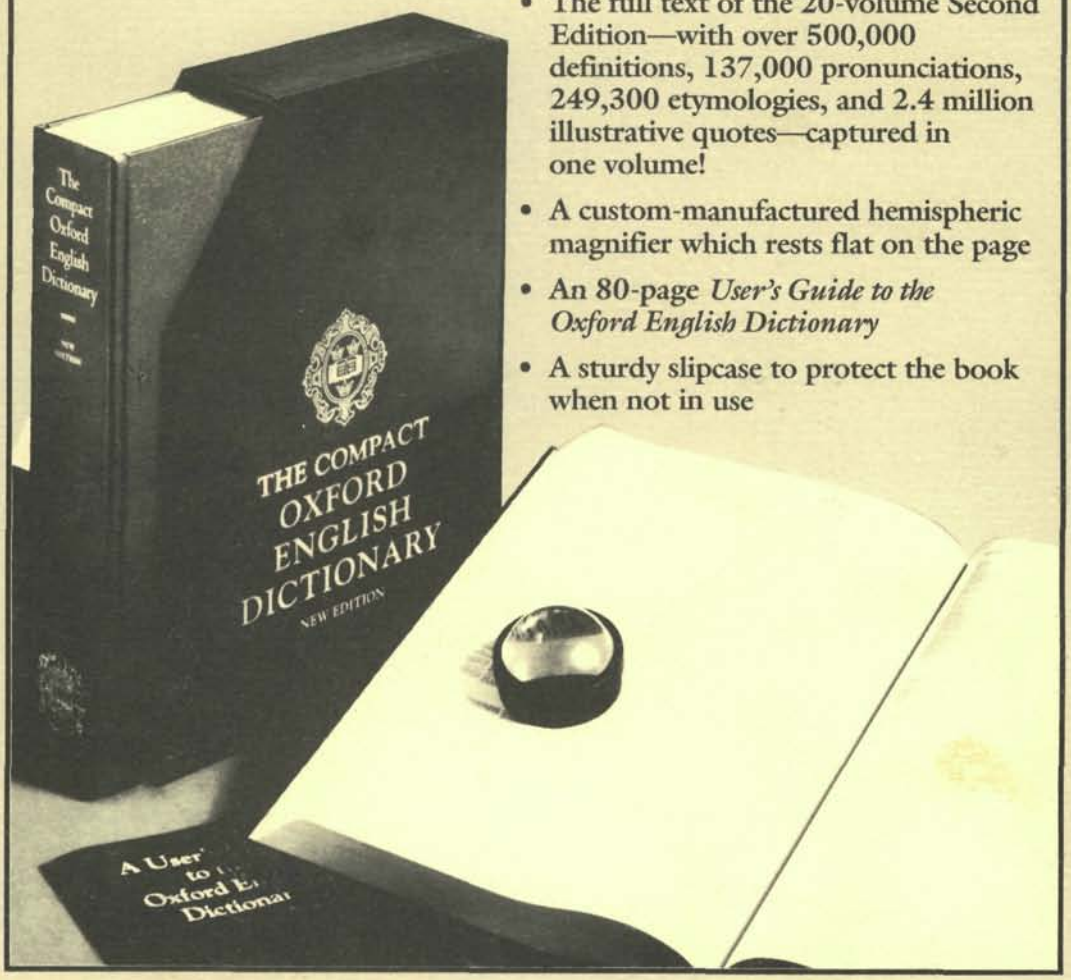
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The arbiter of the English language as it is read and spoken all over the world." —Herbert Mitgang, *The New York Times*

# THE COMPLETE NEW OED
## NOW IN ONE VOLUME
### New Edition
**Edited by EDMUND WEINER and JOHN SIMPSON**

---

## THE COMPACT OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY




- The full text of the 20-volume Second Edition—with over 500,000 definitions, 137,000 pronunciations, 249,300 etymologies, and 2.4 million illustrative quotes—captured in one volume!
- A custom-manufactured hemispheric magnifier which rests flat on the page
- An 80-page *User's Guide to the Oxford English Dictionary*
- A sturdy slipcase to protect the book when not in use

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thomas Pangle cogently points to one of the central paradoxes of contemporary life. Even as liberal democracy has emerged as the aspiration for countless peoples in disparate cultures around the world, its theoretical foundations have come under sustained attack from postmodernists in the countries of its birth, the United States and France. *The Ennobling of Democracy* begins the urgent task of deconstructing deconstructionism, and in the process greatly enriches our understanding of the threats to contemporary democracy."

**—Francis Fukuyama**

"The historical period we are entering looms as one of extraordinary opportunities for the moral as well as material betterment of humanity and, simultaneously, of deepening assault on civilized life. The more widely Thomas Pangle's powerful and penetrating *The Ennobling of Democracy* is read and discussed, the better will be our chances for a wholesome outcome."

**—Eugene D. Genovese**

# THE ENNOBLING OF DEMOCRACY

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE POSTMODERN AGE

## Thomas L. Pangle

"When a thinker of Thomas Pangle's learning, moral seriousness, and prudence sounds an alarm at the 'civic irresponsibility,' 'spiritual deadliness,' and 'philosophical dogmatism' of our currently dominant modes of thinking, we need to begin worrying. When he outlines an agenda for reinvigorating our republican experiment, we would do well to pay heed."

**—Mary Ann Glendon, Harvard Law School**

"Presents a challenge that serious thinkers about democracy and education should not evade."

**—Donald Kagan, Yale University**

*The Johns Hopkins Series in Constitutional Thought: Sotirios Barber and Jeffrey Tulis, Series Editors*

$25.95 hardcover

**THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS**
701 West 40th Street, Suite 275, Baltimore, Maryland 21211
To order, call 1-800-537-5487.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED